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ABSTRACT

This report, undertaken by the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia, intends to provide information on transfer students and identify obstacles faced by transfer students in order to create policy that will aid transfer students in the future. Key findings of the report are as follows: (1) transfer enrollments at public four-year institutions are not keeping pace with the number of students at two-year colleges who may plan to transfer; (2) a "2+2" model does not describe the majority of transfer students; (3) transfer activity on Virginia is a regional occurrence; (4) transfer rates for students who transfer to public institutions are lower that those for students who transfer to private institutions; (5) common characteristics of transfer students (age, academic load, finances) put these students at risk for not finishing their baccalaureate degree; (6) while dual degree programs have grown significantly in recent years for community college students, many students are having problems receiving credit for these courses at four-year institutions; and (7) earning excess credits and enrolling for a lengthened period of time at a two-year college level negatively impacts transfer students when they transfer to four-year institutions. After identifying the problems faced by transfer students, the report gives numerous suggestions for making the transition for transfer students a smoother and more successful experience. (Contains 19 tables.) (MZ)

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SCHEV RESEARCH REPORT

ED 481 950

THE CONDITION OF TRANSFER IN THE COMMONWEALTH

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June 2003

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STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA

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PREFACE

Higher Education—in Virginia and in the United States in general—is experiencing change of unprecedented quantity and quality. Changes in economics, demographics, technologies and philosophies are spurring this era of transition and flux. Nowhere do these forces converge more clearly and forcefully than in student enrollment and attendance patterns. In fact, a 1999 U.S. Department of Education report dubbed the current period in American higher education *"The Age of Multi-Institutional Attendance."*[1]

States, institutions and students are struggling to understand the changes sweeping through higher education, grappling to reconcile old and new ideas, processes and realities. "Many of our institutional and public policies are predicated upon assumptions about college going that are no longer valid."[2] Again, nowhere is the appreciation of these changes more lacking-but-needed than in student enrollment, attendance and transfer.

"The increasing complexity of attendance patterns is one of the most significant developments in higher education of our time, one that poses grave challenges to system-wide planning, quality assurance, and student advisement."

-- "Answers in the Tool Box," June 1999, U.S. Department of Education.

At a time when the attainment of citizens' educational goals is paramount for ensuring that a society will thrive and prosper, understanding the enrollment, attendance and transfer patterns that today's college students are exhibiting while attaining their goals is becoming increasingly difficult.[3] As more and more students move into and through our colleges and universities via increasingly varied and complex combinations of institutions, instructional formats and timeframes, our traditional catch-all term, "transfer," becomes more and more limiting and inadequate as a conceptual framework.

In an effort to capture the magnitude and complexity of contemporary transfer—in terms of students, credits and processes—in Virginia, the State Council of Higher Education undertook this investigation into the condition of transfer in the Commonwealth. Beyond a description of transfer activity, this report is intended to identify obstacles to efficient and effective transfer, and to raise policy issues for future discussions of strategies and actions to strengthen transfer and articulation across the continuum of higher education.

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[1] U.S. Department of Education. (June 1999). Answers in the tool box: Academic intensity, attendance patterns, and bachelor's degree attainment. p. 38.

[2] Lumina Foundation for Education. (April 2003). Following the mobile student: Can we develop the capacity for a comprehensive database to assess student progression? p. i.

[3] Ibid.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Context

As the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) developed the 2003 *Systemwide Strategic Plan for Higher Education in Virginia*, the strengthening of transfer and articulation policies emerged as a key strategy in dealing with budget shortfalls, demands for greater efficiency in higher education, and pressures to provide access to at least 38,000 additional students by the end of the decade.[4] As a result, one of the plan's strategies for "advancing Virginia through higher education" is "expanding the capability of our community college system and ensuring reduced time to degree through seamless transfer between community colleges and senior institutions."[5]

Therefore, the factors that contribute to inefficiencies in transfer in Virginia must be identified and policies must be developed that will reduce obstacles to access and completion of baccalaureate degree programs. The purposes of this report on the condition of transfer in the Commonwealth are to: (1) describe transfer activity in Virginia; (2) identify obstacles to efficient and effective transfer; and (3) raise policy issues for future discussions of strategies and actions to strengthen transfer and articulation across Virginia's higher education continuum.

Key Issues

On multiple occasions during SCHEV's development of the systemwide strategic plan, constituents within and outside higher education called on the Commonwealth to "fix transfer." Indeed, across the U.S., improving the transfer environment has become an increasingly important policy goal for state higher education agencies in recent years.[6] At the same time, national research on student enrollment and attendance indicates significant increases in the numbers of transfer students and in the forms of transfer activity. In undertaking this analysis of the condition of transfer, SCHEV staff was mindful of: (1) the potentialities of transfer (i.e., its potential for efficiently and effectively expanding access to more students); (2) the

> "Reading a college transcript today is like examining a quilt. It is made up of pieces and patches obtained from several sources. Though the patterns of progress toward postsecondary goal achievement have changed dramatically, our ability to comprehend these patterns has not kept pace."
>
> *-- "Following the Mobile Student," April 2003, Lumina Foundation for Education*

[4] This enrollment projection was based on 1990 U.S. Census data as well as the assumption that current participation rates will continue through 2010.

[5] State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. (December 2002). Advancing Virginia through higher education: The systemwide strategic plan for higher education in Virginia. p. 7.

[6] State Higher Education Executive Officers. (2000). Issue priorities and trends in state higher education. (Denver, CO).

concerns about transfer (i.e., its generation of calls for it to be "fixed," which were taken as concerns over efficiency and effectiveness); and (3) the realities of transfer (i.e., the increasing numbers of students and forms of activity, as well as the limitations of enrollment/attendance tracking data).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- **Nationwide, one-third of all students who enroll as first-time degree-seekers transfer at least once (25% of four-year students; 43% of two-year students),[7] and more than one-half of those who eventually earn bachelor's degrees do so after having enrolled in two or more institutions (almost one-fifth after having enrolled in three or more).[8]**
- **In the absence of effective policies for transferring credits, taxpayers pay twice for courses that must be repeated and for courses that do not advance students toward a degree (excess credits beyond those required for degree completion).**
- **The average cost in dollars per FTES (full-time equated student) in community colleges in Virginia is less than half the cost at most public four-year institutions.**
- **Transfer is a critical tool for increasing enrollments and graduation rates of underrepresented groups in baccalaureate degree programs.**
- **Transfer policies should increase efficiency and effectiveness of the transfer process by reducing obstacles to access and completion of baccalaureate degree programs.**

Note: Unless otherwise indicated,[9] the data used in this report include any student enrolled in Virginia at a two- or four-year institution in the spring semester in a given academic year who enrolled as a degree-seeking student in one of the Commonwealth's 15 four-year public institutions in the subsequent fall semester (summer transfers are counted in the fall numbers). This study does not account for spring semester transfers (of which there are comparatively few), transfers to/from out-of-state institutions, and students who may have chosen to delay transferring for a semester or more. This report also excludes transfers between community colleges and reverse transfers (from four-year to two-year institutions). Thus, the full scope of transfer activity between institutions is understated in this report.

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[7] Education Commission of the States. (February 2001). State notes: Transfer and articulation policies.

[8] Lumina Foundation for Education. (April 2003). Following the mobile student: Can we develop the capacity for a comprehensive database to assess student progression?" p. 2.

[9] For comparative purposes, data regarding the transfer activity at Virginia's private non-profit institutions are noted in selected contexts and discussions.

Key Findings, Implications and Recommendations

KEY FINDINGS

(Discussion of these findings, along with their policy implications and SCHEV's recommendations, appear on subsequent pages.)

1. **Transfer enrollments at public four-year institutions are not keeping pace with the growth in the number of students at two-year colleges who may plan to transfer.** Since 1998-99, the number of transfers from two-year colleges has increased only about 2% while the number of associate degree graduates has increased by more than 9%.

2. **A "2+2 model" (completing a two-year associate degree, then transferring to pursue the final two years of a bachelor's degree) does not describe accurately the majority of student transfer activity.** The majority of students who transfer do so without the associate degree; students are increasingly enrolling in the courses they want and/or need wherever they can find them and are seeking to transfer their credits when they decide the time is right for their circumstances.

3. **For transfer students from two-year colleges, their rates of acceptance into four-year colleges and universities reflect strongly the missions of the senior institutions.** Data from the Reports of Institutional Effectiveness reflect a pattern of lower and declining numbers of transfers from two-year colleges to the more selective institutions, accompanied by higher and increasing numbers of transfers to the larger urban institutions.

4. **Transfer activity in Virginia is largely a regional phenomenon; students' proximity to four-year public or private institutions affects their transfer decisions and activities.**

5. A. **The majority of associate degree graduates who subsequently enroll at four-year public institutions receive classifications as juniors, but over time, these transfers tend to lag behind native students in four-, five- and six-year graduation rates.**

   B. **Graduation rates for students who transfer to public institutions are lower than those for students who transfer to private institutions.**

6. **In general, characteristics of the transfer population (e.g. age, academic load, finances) may put these students at risk for not completing the four-year degree.** Specifically, two-year colleges in Virginia may not be making significant contributions to increasing the percentage of minority students who transfer to four-year institutions.

7. **As dual credit programs (in which secondary students take college courses for simultaneous secondary/college credit) have grown significantly in recent years, more and more students are experiencing difficulty in receiving credit for such courses when they enroll at four-year public institutions.**

8. **Earning excess credits (those which do not advance the student toward degree completion) and enrolling for prolonged periods at the two-year college level negatively impact transfer students' credit transferability and time-to-degree at the four-year level.**

FINDING 1: TRANSFER ENROLLMENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS ARE NOT KEEPING PACE WITH THE GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS AT TWO-YEAR COLLEGES WHO MAY PLAN TO TRANSFER. Since 1998-99, the number of transfers from two-year colleges has increased only about 2% while the number of associate degree graduates has increased by more than 9%. Four-year institutions appear to have placed a priority on retaining current students and recruiting new students rather than increasing the percentage of transfers from two-year colleges.

Policy Issues/Implications: How are adequate openings for transfer students best ensured, particularly in highly competitive, high-demand fields? All capable students who enter a transfer degree program at a two-year college should expect to have reasonable access to a baccalaureate degree program when they complete the associate degree.

Recommendations: Consistent with institutional missions and projected enrollment growth, options should be explored to provide incentives for four-year institutions to increase the size of the in-state transfer population relative to other enrollments:

1. offer higher dollars per FTES based on the percentage increase in proportion of transfers enrolled;
2. increase financial aid for transfer students to attend those four-year institutions that exhibit the greatest capacity to absorb additional transfer students;
3. encourage four-year institutions to give priority to graduates of two-year colleges in admissions;
4. encourage dual-admission programs for qualified undergraduates to guarantee access for those transfer students best prepared to move into a baccalaureate degree program.

FINDING 2: A "2+2 MODEL" (COMPLETING A TWO-YEAR ASSOCIATE DEGREE, THEN TRANSFERRING TO PURSUE THE FINAL TWO YEARS OF A BACHELOR'S DEGREE) DOES NOT DESCRIBE ACCURATELY THE MAJORITY OF STUDENT TRANSFER ACTIVITY. The majority of students who transfer do so without the associate degree; students are increasingly enrolling in the courses they want and/or need wherever they can find them and are seeking to transfer their credits when they decide the time is right for their circumstances.

Policy Issues/Implications: Should the Commonwealth develop policies to deal with various transfer patterns, or continue to focus on transfers from two-year colleges? Completing the associate degree before transferring should be encouraged to increase the likelihood that students will complete the baccalaureate degree. Not only do students benefit from earning additional hours at the community college and minimizing the financial burden of educational expenses, but also the Commonwealth benefits by the lower dollar cost per FTES to support students in two-year colleges. Furthermore, degree-seeking students at two-year colleges are more likely to access accurate sources of information concerning transferability of courses.

Recommendations: Options should be explored to:

1. provide guaranteed admission to a public four-year institution to associate degree graduates who meet specific requirements outlined in regional articulation agreements,
2. require non-graduates to demonstrate ability through additional assessments of general education skills and knowledge (e.g. competency assessments, SATs) for admission to a baccalaureate degree program;
3. provide incentives through financial aid programs targeted for associate degree graduates;
4. develop a central technical infrastructure that can serve as a statewide, online interactive advising tool for determining how courses will transfer and apply toward degree requirements for various majors at participating institutions.

FINDING 3: FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS FROM TWO-YEAR COLLEGES, THEIR RATES OF ACCEPTANCE INTO FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES REFLECT STRONGLY THE MISSIONS OF THE SENIOR INSTITUTIONS. Data from the Reports of Institutional Effectiveness reflect a pattern of lower and declining numbers of transfers from two-year colleges to the more selective institutions, accompanied by higher and increasing numbers of transfers to the larger urban institutions.

Policy Issues/Implications: Should all four-year institutions be expected to enroll transfer students? Institutional autonomy in admissions and the diversity of Virginia colleges and universities should be respected. But every senior institution should assume responsibility for enrolling qualified transfers from two-year colleges.

Recommendations: Following a study of institutional missions and enrollment capacity in the system, consideration might be given to:

1. designating institutions as primary transfer institutions and providing incentives to develop support services appropriate for students at high risk for not completing the baccalaureate degree;
2. supporting better utilization of Virginia's private colleges to meet increasing demand for transfer enrollments.

FINDING 4: TRANSFER ACTIVITY IN VIRGINIA IS LARGELY A REGIONAL PHENOMENON; STUDENTS' PROXIMITY TO FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC OR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS AFFECTS THEIR TRANSFER DECISIONS AND ACTIVITIES.

***Policy Issues/Implications*:** How might the regional nature of transfer be used to improve articulation? Articulation agreements, based on specific courses required for the student's intended major, provide the best guarantee that transfer students will meet requisites and prerequisites and avoid duplicating courses or transferring an excess of elective credit.

Recommendations: The strong relationships already in place between local institutions should be encouraged further by:

1. supporting faculty meetings to develop regional articulation agreements by cluster area (e.g. business, education, engineering, social sciences) to assure smooth transfer among all participating institutions in the region;
2. encouraging institutions to provide distance education courses that allow students in other parts of the state to access courses that may not be offered locally so that they may participate in agreements outside of their own region.

FINDING 5.A.: THE MAJORITY OF ASSOCIATE DEGREE GRADUATES WHO SUBSEQUENTLY ENROLL AT FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS RECEIVE CLASSIFICATIONS AS JUNIORS, BUT OVER TIME, THESE TRANSFERS TEND TO LAG BEHIND NATIVE STUDENTS IN FOUR-, FIVE- AND SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATES.

Policy Issues/Implications: Given that community college students are more likely to share non-traditional characteristics, a number of factors may contribute to the lower graduation rates at public institutions—e.g., age, academic load, finances, and access to support services. Another possible explanation may be that credits earned at the two-year college are being accepted in transfer as excess elective credits that do not meet specific requirements or advance students efficiently toward degree completion.

Recommendations: To increase the efficiency of credits transferred from two-year institutions, consideration should be given to:

1. defining appropriate lower-level requisites and prerequisites by field or discipline, which can also be used to satisfy lower-division general education requirements;
2. encouraging the declaration of a field(s) of interest and a transfer institution(s) by the time that students at two-year institutions have completed 30 credits;
3. strengthening language in the state transfer policy concerning waivers of lower-level general education requirements for graduates of a transfer associate degree program;
4. revisiting the recommendations made in 1999 by the Council to institutions and their Boards of Visitors concerning general education programs;
5. examining the phenomenon of "major creep" into the general education program, which promotes the designation of specific general education courses that can be "double-counted" to fulfill general education requirements and "other degree requirements" for the major.

FINDING 5.B.: GRADUATION RATES FOR STUDENTS WHO TRANSFER TO PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS ARE LOWER THAN THOSE FOR STUDENTS WHO TRANSFER TO PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS.

Policy Issues/Implications: Based on enrollment patterns, private institutions may have greater capacity than public institutions to absorb and support more transfer students.

Recommendations: SCHEV should:

1. explore the reasons for the discrepancies in graduation rates for two-year college transfers to public and private four-year institutions. Issues related to admissions policies, transfer of credits, support services, and cost of attendance should be addressed;
2. consider providing incentives for students to attend private four-year institutions (e.g. increasing the TAG grants) in the context of the cost to the state of supporting students at the four-year institutions versus the private institutions.

FINDING 6: IN GENERAL, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRANSFER POPULATION (E.G. AGE, ACADEMIC LOAD, FINANCES) MAY PUT SUCH STUDENTS AT RISK FOR NOT COMPLETING THE FOUR-YEAR DEGREE. More specifically, two-year colleges in Virginia may not be making significant contributions to increasing the percentage of minority students who transfer to four-year institutions.

Policy Issues/Implications: To what degree is financial aid a factor in students' transfer decisions? What can be done to increase the percentage of minority students who transfer? In 1995, Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 182 requested that SCHEV and the VCCS conduct a study of the transfer of academic credit that would reflect the status of, and need for, academic and financial assistance and incentive programs to encourage minorities to pursue postsecondary education and training. Consistent with findings in this report, the 1995 study found that African-American students are represented by smaller percentages in the transfer population than in the general population at public four-year institutions. The 1995 report also showed that minority students are more likely than other students to transfer from non-degree or occupational-technical programs than from university-parallel degree programs designed for transfer.

Recommendation: Based on these findings, additional research should be focused on minority student enrollment patterns to identify obstacles and develop strategies to improve minority student transfer and graduation rates.

FINDING 7: AS DUAL CREDIT PROGRAMS HAVE GROWN IN RECENT YEARS, MORE AND MORE STUDENTS ARE EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY IN RECEIVING CREDIT FOR SUCH COURSES WHEN THEY ENROLL AT FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS.

Policy Issues/Implications: High schools and community colleges are funded for dual credit programs to encourage and support student aspirations to attend college and accelerate graduation with a degree.

Recommendation: Based on the rapid enrollment growth in dual credit courses and on evidence of increasingly reluctant acceptance of such credits at the four-year level, a comprehensive study of the costs, purposes, policies and practices in dual credit programs in the Commonwealth should be conducted. The study should examine the effectiveness of dual credit programs in accelerating time-to-degree, increasing access

to college degree programs, and providing more rigorous academics for high-achieving students, as well as perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders toward acceptance of college-level credits earned in high school. Additional information is also needed to compare the academic performance of dual credit students and students who complete Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs. Such a study is recommended before any policies are developed to encourage further expansion of such programs.

FINDING 8: EARNING EXCESS CREDITS (THOSE WHICH DO NOT ADVANCE THE STUDENT TOWARD DEGREE COMPLETION) AND ENROLLING FOR PROLONGED PERIODS AT THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE LEVEL NEGATIVELY IMPACT TRANSFER STUDENTS' CREDIT TRANSFERABILITY AND TIME-TO-DEGREE AT THE FOUR-YEAR LEVEL. For students in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), the median number of credits earned exceeds the number required for the associate degree by four to eleven credits.[10] The average time-to-degree—nearly five years—reflects the fact that many students take 7-8 years (or longer) to earn the associate degree; nonetheless, one-half of VCCS graduates earn the transfer associate degree in three years or less.

Policy Issues/Implications: Clearly, two-year college students earn excess credits and take more than two years to complete the transfer associate degree. Excess credits do not advance the student toward completion of the baccalaureate degree, and time-to-degree raises issues related to catalog year, curriculum changes, the "age" of credits presented in transfer, and access to high demand fields.

Recommendations: SCHEV should:

1. work with institutions to develop articulation agreements that define appropriate lower-level requisites and prerequisites by field or discipline, which can also be used to satisfy lower-division general education requirements;
2. study actual course enrollments for associate degree graduates and determine the full extent of, and the reasons for, excess credits earned for the associate degree;
3. encourage the VCCS to examine ways to improve academic advising and curriculum planning and encourage students at the two-year institution to declare a field(s) of interest and a transfer institution(s) by the time they've completed 30 credits;
4. work with institutions to improve the accuracy and accessibility of transfer information;
5. work with institutions to replicate the Course-based Model of Student Success to identify strengths and weaknesses in VCCS courses that prepare students for transfer.

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[10] This median excludes developmental courses, credits that are not applicable to the award, and credits that are attempted but not successfully completed, thus understating the actual number of credits students may attempt while earning the associate degree.

Conclusion

Transfer activity is becoming not only increasingly common, but also increasingly complex. The sheer numbers and varieties of the transfer "phenomena," compounded by nationwide deficiencies in tracking data at the student and credit levels, are contributing to an increasingly unclear understanding—if not definition—of transfer. In Virginia, these factors are playing out against a backdrop of goals and/or expectations that are multiple and potentially conflicting at the student and institutional levels, and are unclear and/or poorly communicated at the state level.

> **"The changes in attendance patterns ... are part of the larger currents of a wealthy open market ... . As a society, we have become more consumerist and less attached to organizations and institutions with which we 'do business.' ... It is thus not surprising to find students filling their undergraduate portfolios with courses and credentials from a variety of sources, much as we fill our shopping bags at the local mall."**
>
> ***—"Answers in the Tool Box," June 1999, U.S. Department of Education***

As a result of the convergence of the broadening scope of transfer—its manifestations, its definitions, and its goals, perceptions of problems with transfer are increasing in Virginia. And no doubt, real problems related to transfer—beyond the data and findings of this report—are increasing. The end results are more vocal and frequent calls for the Commonwealth to "fix transfer," as well as an increasing variety of proposed solutions.

As stated in the Preface of this report, higher education is changing. As indicated by the quote above, college students are also changing. As their expectations about, and goals for, higher education change, Virginia must refine and communicate its goals and expectations for the transfer process. This report is intended to serve as a starting point for understanding the transfer phenomenon's growing complexity and broadening definition, as well as the widening expectations placed upon it by students, institutions and policymakers. This information should be used to revisit state and institutional policies on transfer; moreover, this report should function as a basis from which the Commonwealth should establish and prioritize clearer system-level goals and expectations for the evolving transfer phenomenon. With a common definition of transfer and clear goals for its effective implementation, the Commonwealth will be in a better position to identify strategies to enhance transfer and to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of those strategies in advancing higher education for all qualified students in Virginia.

THE CONDITION OF TRANSFER IN THE COMMONWEALTH

INTRODUCTION

National Context

Across the U.S., demands for accountability and responsiveness to market needs have been translated into various laws and policies related to public higher education, including statewide policies on transfer and articulation. Designed to ensure quality, access, and efficiency in moving students from one education sector to another, the construct of a "seamless continuum" of education has been adopted by some states to address multiple issues ranked as critical by state and institutional higher education boards. Transfer and articulation policies can be used to address teacher shortages and the quality of teacher preparation, the role of higher education in economic and workforce development, cost containment, standards-based accountability, and eliminating barriers to educational opportunities.[11]

> "Given the social and economic advantages of smooth transfer to individuals and states, improving articulation policy and practice is a matter of significant public interest. Effective articulation and transfer practices assure efficient use of public funds and foster education and social equity for those undertaking their postsecondary education ..."
>
> -- *"Improving Articulation Policy to Increase Transfer," September 1988, Education Commission of the States*

Anecdotal stories of transfer students who lost credits have contributed to perceptions that two- and four-year colleges and universities are not working cooperatively to facilitate transfer and articulation across this continuum, and many states have taken action to mandate policy or provide incentives for better cooperation. Although transfer has been a long-standing issue for community colleges, state-level policies that address inefficiencies in the transfer of credits between institutions are relatively new. Results of a recent national study indicate that the number of states with statewide transfer and articulation policies has increased dramatically over the past fifteen years. Thirty-four of 43 states (79%) included in the study reported the existence of statewide guidelines and policies in the year 2000.[12]

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[11] Issues taken from a summary published by the Association of Governing Boards. Available at http://www.agb.org.

[12] Ignash, J.M. and Townsend, B.K. (2000). Evaluating state-level articulation agreements according to good practice. Community College Review, 28(3), p. 1.

Driven primarily by financial interests, legislators are pressuring institutions to be more productive and efficient in their operations, and transfer and graduation rates have become benchmarks for accountability in several states' funding models. From a system-wide perspective, transfer, graduation, and retention rates should be examined together because transfer students are not dropouts. Transfer students are retained and graduated, but from a different institution than that of their initial enrollment. As a cost-saving measure, many states have developed transfer and articulation policies that encourage students to begin their education at lower-cost community colleges. Because minorities and non-traditional students are disproportionately enrolled in community colleges, the two-year college is viewed by many as a critical tool for increasing enrollments and graduation rates of these underrepresented groups in baccalaureate degree programs. But many state legislators believe that, without effective policies for transferring credits, taxpayers may pay twice for the same education, students may be denied access because of competitive admission policies, or students may be forced to delay graduation if required courses must be repeated to earn the baccalaureate degree.

In 2001, the Education Commission of the States reported that **"nationwide, a third of all first-time, degree-seeking students transfer at least once within four years after initial enrollment—25% who begin at four-year institutions, and 43% who begin at two-year institutions."**[13]

In 2003, the Lumina Foundation for Education reported that **"more than half of the students who ultimately earn bachelor's degrees enroll in two or more institutions, and almost a fifth attend three or more."**[14]

The recent national studies quoted in the box above indicate a significant amount of transfer activity in the U.S. However, the full extent of transfer activity is largely unknown due to difficulties in defining, identifying, and collecting transfer data at the student (rather than institutional) level. Most state policies address traditional transfer of associate degree graduates from two-year to four-year institutions, but only about one-half of these state policies acknowledge multiple transfer patterns.[15]

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[13] Education Commission of the States. (February 2001). State notes: Transfer and articulation policies. Available at www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/23/75/2375.htm.

[14] Lumina Foundation for Education. (April 2003). Following the mobile student: Can we develop the capacity for a comprehensive database to assess student progression? p. 2.

[15] Ignash, J.M. & Townsend, B.K. (2000). Evaluating state-level articulation agreements according to good practice. Community College Review, 28(3).

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Understanding Transfer

> "... today's college student is more likely than ever to transfer from one institution, enroll in a second or third school, and simultaneously take distance-learning courses from yet another provider."
>
> --*"Following the Mobile Student," April 2003, Lumina Foundation*

Defining Transfer Students. Students who transfer to a four-year institution may do so after completion of one or more courses at a community college, after earning the associate degree, or after completing a number of courses at another four-year college or university. Students who begin college at one four-year institution may enroll during the summer in another local two- or four-year college and transfer courses back to their "home" college or university. Others may attempt distance education courses or enroll concurrently in two or more institutions in the same semester. High school students may complete up to two years of college through dual enrollment programs offered by the local community college before earning their high school diplomas, and many will seek credit for these courses at a four-year institution. A student who initially enrolls in a four-year university in the college of arts and sciences and then moves into the college of business at the same institution may experience loss of credits due to the internal "transfer." A definition of "transfer students" might include all of these scenarios, and transfer studies and efforts to develop effective transfer policy have been hampered by the lack of a common definition.

The Transfer Process. Although transfer policies may be mandated at the state level, specific program requirements, course content and syllabi, and instructional methods are implemented based on the mission and culture of individual institutions, and interpreted by local department chairs and faculty. Few states can guarantee uniformity of a general education core—even with a common course numbering system and mandated course equivalencies. Control of the curriculum traditionally has been a prerogative of the faculty, who determine what, when, and by whom the general education core should be taught. In fact, transfer and articulation policies are based on assumptions about the competencies students achieve, but they operate on the basis of course equivalencies. Transfer students can be denied earned credit if the faculty determines that the content of the courses presented in transfer does not reflect equivalent course content at the receiving institution. Articulation is based also on an assumption of common criteria and standards of performance that define college-level work as "upper" or "lower" division, or as "academic" or "vocational" courses. Few states, however, have supported statewide discussions between two- and four-year faculty for the purpose of reaching consensus on what students should know and be able to do throughout the curriculum. (For readers seeking a more comprehensive discussion of the credit-transfer process, a State Committee on Transfer monograph, *Understanding How Credits Transfer*, is reprinted in the Appendix. Also, the *State Policy on Transfer* is available on SCHEV's website at http://www.schev.edu/Students/transferPolicy.asp?from=adminfaculty.)

Transfer in Virginia. To avoid issues related to competencies or diversity of students, institutions, and courses, some state policies mandate acceptance of the associate in arts or sciences degree towards fulfilling lower-division requirements for the baccalaureate degree. Others may use a common exam to ensure readiness for upper division work. Virginia's state transfer policy does not mandate admission standards, guaranteed admissions, or a common general education core. It directs only that associate-degree graduates of university-parallel degree programs who are granted admission should be given junior status and that lower-division general education requirements should be waived. A "transfer module" provides an option for students who do not complete the degree to transfer a block of courses that should be applied as partial fulfillment of the lower division general education requirements at public colleges and universities, but it does not define a core of required courses for all students.

Not all programs of study at the community college are intended for transfer. As comprehensive institutions, community colleges provide both occupational-technical and university-parallel programs to prepare students to enter the work force or transfer to a four-year college or university. Viewed as job-training rather than academically challenging programs, associate in applied sciences degrees are not easily transferred into bachelor of arts or bachelor of science programs. Occupational programs are technically oriented and often lack a broad-based general education core or theoretical courses in mathematics or the sciences. Virginia's state policy encourages articulation of applied degree programs with appropriate baccalaureate professional degrees, but offers no guarantees for students who transfer from applied programs.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has designated the community colleges as the appropriate agents for delivering remedial education programs to enhance students' readiness for college level study, and for administering dual credit programs for high school students academically ready to earn college credit while they complete their high school studies. Because of lower tuition and operating costs at community colleges, Virginia recognized the potential of improved transfer for reducing costs of higher education, increasing access (particularly for minorities), avoiding duplication, and improving education quality when it enacted the state transfer policy in 1991. The average cost, in dollars per full-time equivalent student (FTES), in the VCCS is less than half the cost at most public four-year institutions.[16]

Although the intent of Virginia's transfer policy is uniform and equitable treatment of transfer students by all public institutions, the policy avoids the issues of competitive admissions or narrowly defined prerequisites in highly selective or high-demand programs. By addressing only those two-year college students who are granted admission to a public four-year institution, and by focusing on associate degree graduates, the policy also fails to address the needs of students who take a limited number of courses before they transfer—by far the largest group of potential transfer students.

Virginia's state transfer policy provides for a State Committee on Transfer that serves as an advisory group to SCHEV and the VCCS on transfer issues. Over the past

[16] SCHEV Finance Policy data/2002-03 Adjusted E&G Appropriations per FTE Student.

twelve years, the 22-member SCHEV-appointed committee has monitored compliance with the state policy, developed guidelines for best practices, and recommended policy modifications to address specific issues. The state policy also provides for a Chief Transfer Officer (CTO) at each of the public institutions to serve as the campus liaison for transfer information. The CTOs meet annually with the state committee to identify emerging issues and develop strategies for addressing any concerns. Although not subject to SCHEV's transfer policy, most of the private, non-profit institutions in the Commonwealth honor the policy and work with the state transfer committee through their representatives.

This Report

One strategy of the 2003 systemwide strategic plan for "advancing Virginia through higher education" is "expanding the capability of our community college system and ensuring reduced time to degree through seamless transfer between community colleges and senior institutions." Therefore, SCHEV must identify the factors that contribute to inefficiencies in transfer and develop policies that will reduce obstacles to access and completion of baccalaureate degree programs.

The purposes of this report on the condition of transfer in the Commonwealth are to: (1) describe transfer activity in Virginia; (2) identify obstacles to efficient and effective transfer; and (3) raise policy issues for future discussions of strategies and actions to strengthen transfer and articulation across the continuum of higher education.

FINDINGS

Context and Delimitations

Context. Moving students efficiently and effectively between and among diverse and autonomous colleges and universities is a daunting challenge. Ultimately, state-level policies must be implemented at the institutional level, leaving the door open for numerous interpretations of policy and opportunities to operationalize policy in terms consistent with institutional mission and culture. Faculty and staff, students, and policy-makers all have rights and responsibilities related to the effective design and implementation of state transfer policy.

A number of factors have contributed to perceptions that Virginia's *State Policy on Transfer* is inefficient, if not ineffective, in facilitating the smooth transfer of credits between and among institutions—particularly for two-year college students who wish to pursue a baccalaureate degree program at a four-year college or university. One major factor involves community college students' tendency to exhibit "non-traditional" characteristics (as compared to "traditional" college students who, typically, enroll in four-year institutions immediately after high school, attend full-time, are academically prepared, and remain financially dependent on parents).

While recent national research indicates that the two most important risk factors for not completing a degree are: (1) delaying entry into college, and (2) enrolling part-time,[17] two-year college students typically exhibit more "non-traditional" or high risk characteristics that impede progress and present obstacles to pursuing the baccalaureate degree. Frequently, they have failed to plan for college and must delay enrollment due to a lack of adequate financial resources or academic preparation. Often they must attend part-time and work to support themselves or their dependents. Students often use the community college to explore their interests and abilities, and frequently change their minds about their career goals, academic programs, and transfer institutions.

Delimitations. The following sections of this report describe the in-state transfer population and process in Virginia and discuss issues related to admissions and access, efficiency in credit transfer, transferability of "early college" credits, and graduation rates. Unless otherwise noted,[18] the data used in this report include any student enrolled in a two-year college in a given academic year who enrolled as a degree-seeking student in a four-year public institution in the subsequent fall semester (summer transfers are counted in the fall numbers). These data do not account for spring transfers (of which there are comparatively few), students who may have delayed transferring for a semester or more, and students who transfer from/to out-of-state institutions. Figures also exclude transfers between community colleges as well as "reverse" transfers from four- to two-year institutions. Thus, the scope of all transfer activity is understated.

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[17] Berkner, L., He, S., Cataldi, E.F., and Knepper, P. (December 2002). Descriptive summary of 1995-96 beginning postsecondary students: Six years later. National Center for Education Statistics.

[18] For comparative purposes, data regarding the transfer activity at Virginia's private non-profit institutions are noted in selected contexts and discussions.

The Transfer Population

Total Numbers. For Virginia's 15 four-year public institutions, in-state transfers included 1,374 transfers from other four-year public institutions and 4,204 transfers from two-year public colleges, for a total of 5,578 in-state transfers in 2002-03. This total represents: (1) the most in-state transfers to public four-year institutions since 1993-94; and (2) an increase of 12.5% since 2000-01. However, the general trend over the past ten years has been flat.

Between 1993-94 and 2002-03, the number of in-state transfers from four-year public institutions declined by 17%, while such transfers from two-year public colleges increased by 5%, for a net decline of 1.5% over the period.[19] In comparison, during this same time span, total enrollments in Virginia's public four-year institutions increased 15.8%, with the number of new students increasing by 28.2% and the number of continuing/other students rising by 14.6%.

IN-STATE TRANSFERS TO FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS, 1993-94 TO 2002-03

	NUMBER OF IN-STATE TRANSFERS TO FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS		
YEAR	TOTAL	FROM 2-YR. PUBLICS	FROM OTHER 4-YR. PUBLICS
1993-94	5661	4005	1656
1994-95	5485	4149	1336
1995-96	5309	4035	1274
1996-97	5426	4124	1302
1997-98	5506	4200	1306
1998-99	5362	4105	1257
1999-00	5531	3943	1588
2000-01	4959	3697	1262
2001-02	5369	4017	1352
2002-03	5578	4204	1374
NET CHANGE	-1.46%	+4.97%	-17.03%

Two scenarios, which are not mutually exclusive, are possible explanations of these findings. First, Virginia's four-year public institutions may have been placing a priority on recruiting new students and retaining current students rather than increasing the number/percentage of in-state transfer students. Second, and perhaps as a result of the first, four-year public institutions' successes in recruiting and retaining students may have left comparatively fewer spaces into which students could transfer.

Although this study focuses on in-state transfers to public four-year institutions, it is worthwhile to note that, as a percentage of total enrollments for private four-year institutions, transfer enrollments declined only slightly (from 8.5% to 8.2% of total enrollments) between 1993-94 and 2002-03. During this same period, private four-year institutions experienced a net decline of 18.5% in total enrollment numbers (the number of new students declined 24.4% while the number of continuing students declined 15.8%) and a drop of 21.7% in total transfer numbers. These declines in enrollments of all groups at private institutions suggest that these institutions have greater capacity for increased enrollments of both transfer and new students.

[19] The total number of all transfer students (in-state, out-of-state, two- and four-year transfers) declined by 0.50% over this period.

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Age. On average, Virginia's in-state transfer population is older than the general undergraduate population at its public institutions. While approximately 35 percent of all in-state undergraduates at public institutions are above age 21, more than 43 percent of all in-state transfers were above age 21 in 2002-03. And, for in-state transfers from two-year colleges, the proportion of students aged 22+ was approximately 53 percent in 2002-03. Above the traditional 17-21 range, age may be taken as an indicator of delayed entry into college and/or as a product of part-time enrollment, both of which are: (1) negatively associated with baccalaureate-degree completion, and (2) common among students at two-year colleges.

Nonetheless, the proportion of in-state transfer students in the 17-21 age range is increasing. Two-year colleges appear to be attracting more traditional aged students, and further research is needed to determine why community colleges are enrolling more students immediately following high-school graduation. Certainly, cost is a factor for some students, and increasingly competitive admissions at four-year institutions may also contribute to increasing enrollments at community colleges of more traditional college students. As the demand for higher education increases over the next several years, this pattern will no doubt increase the demand for transfer opportunities.

Academic Load. Between 1993-94 and 2002-03, the percentage of transfer students from public four-year institutions that enrolled full-time at other public four-year institutions increased from 90.3% to 94.8%. Over this same period, the percentage of transfers from public two-year colleges that enrolled full-time dropped from 80.5% to 77.9%. Part-time enrollment is noted in the literature as a risk factor for completing a four-year degree

AGE OF IN-STATE UNDERGRADUATE POPULATION AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Age	1992-93	1997-98	2002-03
17-21	44.4%	61.9%	65.0%
22-24	32.4%	16.8%	17.6%
25+	22.9%	20.7%	16.6%

AGE OF TRANSFER POPULATION (ALL IN-STATE TRANSFERS)

Age	1993-94		2002-03	
	N	%	N	%
17-21	1868	33.0	3159	56.6
22-24	1919	34.0	1108	19.9
25+	1859	32.8	1309	23.5
Unknown	15	<1.0	2	<1.0
TOTAL	5661	100.0	5578	100.0

AGE OF TRANSFERS FROM FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Age	1993-94		2002-03	
	N	%	N	%
17-21	821	49.6	1182	86.0
22-24	550	33.2	133	9.7
25+	281	17.0	58	4.2
Unknown	4	<1.0	1	<1.0
TOTAL	1656	100.0	1374	100.0

AGE OF TRANSFERS FROM TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

Age	1993-94		2002-03	
	N	%	N	%
17-21	1047	26.1	1977	47.0
22-24	1369	34.2	975	23.2
25+	1578	39.4	1251	29.8
Unknown	11	<1.0	1	<1.0
TOTAL	4005	100.0	4204	100.0

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program, and two-year college transfer students are far more likely than transfers from four-year colleges to enroll part-time.

ACADEMIC LOAD OF TRANSFER STUDENTS
(FT= Full-time; PT= Part-time Enrollment at the Receiving Institution)

Credit Load	Transfers from Four-year Institutions				Transfers from Two-year Colleges			
	1993-94		2002-03		1993-94		2002-03	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
FT	1496	90.3	1303	94.8	3223	80.5	3277	77.9
PT	160	9.7	71	5.2	782	19.5	927	22.1
TOTAL	**1656**	**100.0**	**1374**	**100.0**	**4005**	**100.0**	**4204**	**100.0**

Age may also function as a mitigating factor in enrollment status and academic load. Older students are more likely to have conflicts with work schedules or heavier demands of providing for dependents that require them to enroll on a part-time basis. Further research is needed to determine the reasons for these differences in academic load (e.g. economics, work schedules, admissions policies that limit the number of part-time students). According to a 2001 Ford Foundation study of transfer, "financial aid is the single most important factor in a student's decision to transfer."[20] Finances also may determine the student's academic load and time-to-degree.

Race/ethnicity. All student populations (undergraduates, transfers from four-year institutions, and transfers from two-year colleges) reflect an increase in racial/ethnic diversity since the early 1990s. In 2002-03, approximately 28-30 percent of the undergraduate and transfer populations were minority students, compared to 17-20 percent in 1993-94. For all racial/ethnic categories, the rate of growth has been greatest for Hispanics, followed by African-Americans/Blacks, and Pacific Islander/Asian groups.

However, transfer enrollments from two-year colleges do not represent significantly greater percentages of minority groups than the general undergraduate population. In 2002-03, minority students comprise 28.0% of two-year transfers, but comprise 30.1% of four-year transfers and 29.7% of the general student population. This finding is rather surprising given that most transfer students originate from community colleges, which are the points of entry into higher education for the majority of minority students.

A 2001 Education Commission of the States (ECS) report on transfer and articulation concluded that "improving the effectiveness of 2/4 transfer will be the key to national progress in closing the gap among racial groups in degree attainment—and it will affect far more students than affirmative action policy."[21] The findings above, coupled with the import of the ESC's assertion, clearly indicate that further research on

[20] Hungar, J.Y. and Liberman, J. (2001). The road to equality. The Ford Foundation, p 101.

[21] Education Commission of the States. (February 2001). State notes: Transfer and articulation policies. Available: www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/23/75/2375.htm

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RACE/ETHNICITY OF THE IN-STATE UNDERGRADUATE POPULATION AT PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Race/ethnicity	1992-93	1997-98	2002-03
African-Amer/Black	14.9%	16.4%	16.1%
Native Amer/Indian	<1.0%	<1.0%	<1.0%
Pacific/Asian	5.9%	7.5%	7.8%
Hispanic	1.7%	2.5%	3.2%
Caucasian	76.6%	72.8%	70.3%

RACE/ETHNICITY OF THE TRANSFER POPULATION (ALL IN-STATE TRANSFERS)

Race/ethnicity	1993-94		2002-03	
	N	%	N	%
African Amer/Black	517	9.1	790	14.2
Native Amer/Indian	32	1.0	25	<1.0
Pacific/Asian	342	6.0	411	7.4
Hispanic	109	1.9	235	4.2
Unknown			128	2.3
Caucasian	4661	82.3	3989	71.5
TOTAL	**5661**	**100.0**	**5578**	**100.0**

RACE/ETHNICITY OF TRANSFERS FROM FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Race/ethnicity	1993-94		2002-03	
	N	%	N	%
African Amer/Black	207	12.5	212	15.4
Native Amer/Indian	3	<1.0	1	<1.0
Pacific/Asian	93	5.6	107	7.8
Hispanic	23	1.4	51	3.7
Unknown			43	3.1
Caucasian	1330	80.3	960	69.9
TOTAL	**1656**	**100.0**	**1374**	**100.0**

RACE/ETHNICITY OF TRANSFERS FROM TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Race/ethnicity	1993-94		2002-03	
	N	%	N	%
African Amer/Black	310	7.7	578	13.7
Native Amer/Indian	29	1.0	24	1.0
Pacific/Asian	249	6.2	304	7.2
Hispanic	86	2.1	184	4.4
Unknown			85	2.0
Caucasian	3331	83.2	3029	72.0
TOTAL	**4005**	**100.0**	**4204**	**100.0**

minority student enrollment patterns and obstacles to increasing transfer rates from community colleges is warranted.

Domicile. The domicile statistics for transfer students suggest that the number of transfer students from each of Virginia's geographic regions is reflective of each region's

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population. Between 1993-94 and 2002-03, declines in transfer numbers from two of the Commonwealth's most populous regions—Central Virginia and Hampton Roads—were offset by increases in transfer numbers in the third high-population region—Northern Virginia. Although the actual numbers of transfer students from the Eastern Shore region were very small, the percentage increase in their numbers was substantial (270.0%). A significant decline in the number and percentage of transfer students from the Valley region was also evident. (Although the types of institutions from which students transferred are not reflected in the table above, the number of students from the Southern Piedmont and Valley regions who transferred from two-year colleges to public four-year institutions dropped dramatically during the 1993-94 to 2002-03 period.)

DOMICILE OF TRANSFER STUDENTS
(Comparing 1993-94 and 2002-03)

Region	1993-94 N	1993-94 %	2002-03 N	2002-03 %	% Change
Central	1125	19.9	1072	19.2	-4.7
Eastern Shore	10	<1.0	37	1.0	+270.0
Hampton Rds.	1167	20.6	1117	20.0	-4.3
Unknown	44	1.0	134	2.4	+204.0
No. Virginia	1746	30.8	1943	34.8	+11.3
So. Piedmont	370	6.5	269	4.8	-27.3
Southwest	581	10.3	526	9.4	-9.5
Valley	485	8.6	151	2.7	-68.9

Degree Holders/Non-holders. Between 1993-94 and 2002-03, approximately 28% of transfer students from two-year colleges earned an associate degree before enrolling in a baccalaureate degree program at a public four-year institution in Virginia. In other words, 72% of students who transfer from two-year colleges to four-year public institutions in Virginia do so without first earning an associate degree.[22] As reported by the ECS, a recent study involving thirteen states indicated that 37% of transfer students in these states earned the associate degree before transferring.[23]

Transfer Activity

Increasing Non-Linearity. Since 1993-94, the number of students enrolling in multiple institutions has grown nearly 43 percent. These numbers include students who enroll concurrently at a two- and a four-year institution, as well as those enrolled concurrently at two or more two-year and/or four-year institutions. Transfer students' geographic proximity to higher education institutions (see the discussion of regionality below), as well as the availability of distance education options, may contribute to the growth of this phenomenon.

[22] Self-reported data from four-year public institutions paint a slightly different picture of transfer from two-year colleges because these data are based on all students whose previous institution was a two-year college, rather than a headcount matched to previous spring enrollments. Data in the 2002 *ROIE* on the number of transfers from Virginia two-year colleges (1997-98 to 2001-02) indicate that the percentage of transfers with the associate degree has risen from 43% to 47%, but that percentage varies by four-year institution (from 9% at VMI to 70% at William and Mary).

[23] Education Commission of the States. (February 2001). State notes: Transfer and articulation policies. Available: www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/23/75/2375.htm

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Although the *State Policy on Transfer* treats transfer as a linear "2+2" process of students moving from two-year to four-year institutions, the process is increasingly non-linear, with students taking the courses they want/need and then seeking to transfer these credits into degree programs. Students' transfer activities increasingly resemble spirals that include concurrent or alternating enrollments in one or more institutions. Expansion of enrollments in distance learning courses also contribute to this "swirling" effect.

STUDENTS ENROLLED CONCURRENTLY IN MULTIPLE INSTITUTIONS

Year	Number of Institutions Attended in Fall			TOTAL
	2	3	4	
	Number of Students			
1993-94	3543	43	0	3586
1994-95	4006	58	13	4077
1995-96	4251	40	13	4304
1996-97	4070	40	0	4110
1997-98	4806	65	1	4872
1998-99	4444	74	1	4519
1999-00	4656	92	1	4749
2000-01	4944	89	6	5039
2001-02	4767	95	3	4865
2002-03	5015	97	3	5113

A March, 2003, VCCS transfer report examined a pool of students who entered a VCCS college for the first time in the fall of 1993, earned at least 12 credits, and transferred to a four-year institution (public or private) within four years (1993-94 to 1996-97).[24] The purpose of defining the cohort in this way was to capture all students who may not be enrolled in a transfer program, but who take more than one to three courses and then transfer to a four-year institution. Having defined transfer students in this way, the VCCS determined that 1 in 3.6 students who began study at a VCCS college, and who completed 12+ credits, eventually transferred to a four-year college or university. Of those who transferred, 62 percent earned a baccalaureate (or higher) degree within five years following transfer. These results are comparable to national transfer rates. Again, a "2+2" model does not accurately describe the transfer behavior of two-year college students or transfer students in general.

Ongoing Regionality. Although geographic service regions are not defined for Virginia's 15 public four-year colleges and universities, the transfer enrollments of these institutions reflect quite clearly the ongoing regional nature of transfer. The table below illustrates the significant percentages of transfer students from specific geographic regions for each public four-year institution over the past ten years.

The geographic locations of Virginia's public four-year institutions appear to be strong factors impacting transfer activity (see also the section on admission and access). Transfer's regional nature suggests that regional articulation agreements may go further than state policy in facilitating efficient transfer and increasing opportunities for students who choose not to travel far from home to attend a four-year college or university.

A white paper prepared for the Chancellor of the VCCS in March, 2002, reported that VCCS colleges have signed 75 general agreements with public and private

[24] McHewitt, E., & Taylor, G. (March 2003). VCCS transfer project: Transfer rates, transfer performance, and baccalaureate completion.

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institutions, and over 85 "two-plus-two" agreements that articulate specific programs at neighboring two- and four-year institutions. These agreements appear to be a student's best guarantee that VCCS courses will meet program requirements and that courses will not have to be repeated or transferred as excess elective credit.

LARGEST PERCENTAGES OF TRANSFER STUDENTS ENROLLED IN FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS BY GEOGRAPHIC REGION

Institution	Geographic Region	1992-93 % transfers	1997-98 % transfers	2002-03 % transfers
Christopher Newport	Hampton Roads	90.3	85.2	70.6
College of William & Mary	Hampton Roads	32.0	45.4	37.6
	Northern Virginia	31.3	18.2	29.9
George Mason	Northern Virginia	92.4	88.4	94.3
James Madison	Northern Virginia	37.5	36.2	40.2
	Valley	26.2	32.4	28.6
Longwood	Southern Piedmont	45.9	40.6	41.3
	Central	23.2	24.1	32.4
Mary Washington	Northern Virginia	76.2	74.0	84.2
Norfolk State	Hampton Roads	88.5	91.7	85.2
Old Dominion	Hampton Roads	70.9	59.6	66.6
Radford	Valley	34.7	41.8	40.3
	Northern Virginia	18.3	13.3	15.5
	Southwest	14.7	18.5	18.1
University of Virginia	Central	41.2	33.6	36.4
	Northern Virginia	28.5	40.4	27.5
UVA's College at Wise	Southwest	87.0	85.7	89.0
Virginia Commonwealth	Central	69.9	67.3	63.1
	Northern Virginia	13.3	12.9	11.3
Virginia Military Institute	Central	28.6	12.5	17.6
	Hampton Roads	21.4	18.7	23.5
	Northern Virginia	21.4	31.2	17.6
Virginia State	Central	74.0	73.9	71.9
Virginia Tech	Northern Virginia	27.9	26.5	30.5
	Valley	23.4	24.5	26.1
	Central	13.4	14.1	13.9

Institutions that feed transfers to more than a few others tend to experience more problems with articulation than those that deal primarily with one or two other institutions. Currently, the equivalency of courses across the community college system is not ensured by the VCCS's statewide course numbering system because community colleges often modify course syllabi to increase compatibility with the requirements of proximal four-year institutions. Course proliferation has been an unintended consequence of VCCS colleges developing courses to meet specific transfer institutions' needs.

Relationship to Institutional Missions. Transfer activity is related not only to the proximity of potential transfer students to public four-year institutions, but also to the missions of the receiving institutions themselves. Published in SCHEV's Web-based *2002 Reports of Institutional Effectiveness*, five years of self-reported data from public

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four-year institutions reflect a pattern of lower and declining numbers of transfers from two-year colleges to the more selective and/or comparatively smaller institutions, and higher and increasing numbers to the urban and/or comparatively larger institutions. The decline ranges from 9 percent at Mary Washington College to 51 percent at Christopher Newport University, while the increase ranges from 7 percent at Virginia Commonwealth University to 33 percent at Virginia State University. Further research is needed to determine the degree to which these changes are affected by the number and strength of the applicant pool as well as the admissions policies and standards of the four-year institutions.

Admission and Access to Baccalaureate Degree Programs

Two-year college students who graduate with a transfer degree typically intend to transfer into a baccalaureate degree program. While the number of university-parallel associate degrees awarded by two-year colleges may fluctuate annually due to changes in student intent and the inconsistent enrollment patterns of community college students, data published by the VCCS show an increase of 9.4% in the number of transfer degrees awarded since 1997-98. However, the number of two-year students who transfer to public four-year institutions has risen only 2% since that academic year. Further research is needed to determine whether associate degree graduates are delaying transfer decisions or are being denied admission to their preferred institutions or majors of choice, and are therefore pursuing other options following graduation.

Acceptance Rates. Eight years of data (1993-94 to 2000-01) on applications for admission from two-year colleges and acceptance of transfers to public four-year institutions indicate an overall acceptance rate of 79% with a 71% yield rate (students accepted and enrolled). Public four-year institutions with acceptance rates over 90% include Old Dominion University, Norfolk State, and UVA-Wise. The most selective public institutions (those with acceptance rates of 50-57%) were the College of William and Mary, the University of Virginia, and Mary Washington College.

Acceptance Rates for Transfers from Two-year Colleges to Public Four-year Institutions (1993-94 through 2000-01)

Public Four-year Institution	Number of Applications	Number Accepted	Percent Accepted	Yield (Accepted & Enrolled)	Percent Enrolled
CNU	3447	3113	90.3	2293	73.7
CWM	1136	575	50.6	356	61.9
GMU	14445	12052	83.4	8496	70.5
JMU	3879	2885	74.4	1851	64.2
LU	2125	1599	75.2	1078	67.4
MWC	1133	645	56.9	474	73.5
NSU	1657	1553	93.7	923	59.4
ODU	9614	9179	95.5	6337	69.0
RU	6611	5604	84.8	3846	68.6
UVA	3334	1761	52.8	1393	79.1
UVA-W	1673	1553	92.8	935	60.2
VCU	11174	8474	75.8	6313	74.5
VMI	127	84	66.1	72	85.7
VSU	362	267	73.8	202	75.6
VT	8075	5054	62.6	3871	76.6

Note: Data were not complete for all institutions for all years; information is summarized based on data available for each institution.

Applications for admission from two-year colleges and acceptance of transfers to selected *private* four-year institutions showed an overall acceptance rate of 84 percent

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with a 66 percent yield rate (students accepted and enrolled). Institutions with acceptance rates above 90 percent included Averett University, Bluefield College, Bridgewater College, Eastern Mennonite University, Emory and Henry College, Marymount University, Saint Paul's College, Shenandoah University, and Virginia Intermont College. The most selective institutions (those with acceptance rates of 47-62 percent) were Randolph-Macon College and Roanoke College.

Acceptance rates are related to institutional mission and selectivity of admissions. Based on totals for 1993-94 through 2000-01, the number of two-year college applicants to public four-year institutions ranged from a low of 127 at Virginia Military Institute to a high of 14,445 at George Mason University. The number of two-year college applicants to private four-year institutions ranged from a low of 116 at Randolph-Macon Women's College to a high of 1,660 at Averett University.

A student may be denied admission for a number of reasons, including failure to meet minimum grade-point requirements or course prerequisites for his/her intended major. The applicant pool for the student's desired institution may have been especially strong, or the demand for the student's intended major may have exceeded the number of spaces available. At the same time, the higher acceptance rates at some institutions may be a reflection of successful articulation agreements with neighboring colleges or an institutional mission that supports transfer education. Further research is needed to identify the most common reasons that two-year students are denied admission to a four-year institution.

Acceptance rates do not provide information on the number of credits students present in transfer and the number of credits that are applied to meet requirements for the baccalaureate degree. SCHEV's database does not identify the source of credits awarded for advanced standing when a student is admitted to the four-year college. Transcript analysis is needed to determine how many credits transfer students lose in transfer, and to identify those VCCS courses that do not transfer or that must be repeated at the four-year institution.

Transfer with/without Associate Degrees. The *State Policy on Transfer* was designed to encourage students to complete the associate degree before transferring. As an incentive, it offers guarantees that the degree should meet all lower-level general education requirements and that the student should be classified as a junior. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the previous finding that only about 28% of transfers to public four-year institutions are associate-degree-holders, students are successful in transferring without the degree. Clearly some four-year institutions put a higher premium on the degree than others, but further research is needed to determine the effects of institution-to-institution articulation agreements on transfer enrollments where degree completion is a condition of guaranteed admission.

Institutions acknowledge that the state policy has improved communications between two- and four-year institutions, but incentives for compliance or consequences of non-compliance have not been tied to policy implementation, and the issue of

resources to monitor and enforce policy has not been addressed at the state level. Furthermore, no incentives have been provided to four-year institutions to increase the percentage or number of transfers accepted from two-year colleges or to require degree completion as a condition of enrollment.

Language in the Code of Virginia and the Appropriation Act protects institutional autonomy in admissions decisions. Some four-year institutions are voluntarily moving in the direction of offering guaranteed admissions to associate degree graduates who meet specific grade point average (GPA) and curricular requirements as outlined in articulation agreements with neighboring two-year colleges. For example, James Madison University has in place a guaranteed admissions agreement with Blue Ridge Community College for students who complete the associate degree and meet the course and GPA requirements. In the 2001-02 academic year, 70 percent of students who transferred into JMU from two-year colleges held the associate degree.

Transfer to Junior/non-junior Status. Four-year institutions have interpreted and implemented the state transfer policy in the context of their own academic policies and procedures, resulting in inconsistencies in transfer practices within and among four-year institutions. Four-year institutions differ in the way they define junior status or treat advanced standing credits that did not originate at the two-year college (credit by exam, distance education courses, Advanced Placement credits). Some institutions will accept "D" grades when transferred as part of a degree; others will not award credit for anything below a "C." Other institutions may, for purposes of determining eligibility for admissions, re-compute a transfer student's GPA based on their own institutional policies.

Data on the student level of transfers from two-year colleges indicate that the majority (78%) of associate degree graduates are classified as juniors or seniors when they enter the four-year college or university. The table below compares data on the classification or student level of transfers to public four-year institutions between 1993-94 and 2002-03. Data are provided for both associate degree graduates and non-graduates.

STUDENT LEVEL OF TWO-YEAR COLLEGE TRANSFERS TO PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

ACADEMIC YEAR 1993-94

	Freshmen		Sophomore		Junior		Senior/5th Year		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Non-grad	449	15.5	1303	45.0	935	32.3	184	6.3	2896	72.3
Grad	68	6.0	237	21.4	731	65.9	71	6.4	1109	27.7
Total	517	12.9	1540	38.4	1666	41.6	255	6.4	4005	100.0

ACADEMIC YEAR 2002-03

	Freshmen		Sophomore		Junior		Senior/5th Year		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Non-grad	507	16.9	1442	48.0	927	30.9	127	4.2	3003	71.4
Grad	29	2.0	235	19.6	867	72.2	70	5.8	1201	28.6
Total	536	12.7	1677	39.9	1794	42.7	197	4.7	4204	100.0

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These data include graduates of applied science degree programs as well as transfer associate degree programs. Graduates of applied degree programs may not meet the lower-level general education requirements of academic programs or may lose credits if they transfer into a major for which the applied degree did not adequately prepare them for transfer.

Transferability of Credits. In response to state-level restructuring mandates, curricular requirements imposed by Boards of Visitors, and the impact of technology on teaching and learning, many four-year institutions have changed the course content and course sequencing of their general education programs. Traditional lower-level courses offered by two-year colleges may no longer advance students efficiently toward the baccalaureate degree. For example, most two-year colleges require six semester hours of freshman composition, but many four-year programs require three semester hours at the lower division level and three semester hours at the upper division level in a writing intensive course.

A related issue for transfer students is that lower-level requisite courses in the major have crept into the general education core (e.g. a business major using prerequisite economics courses to satisfy a general education requirement in social science). Additionally, some courses traditionally taught at the lower level have become upper-level requirements. The associate degree may exceed the number of required general education credits or lack the appropriate prerequisite courses for the intended major at the four-year institution. General-education requirements at most four-year institutions range from 45-55 credits. A 63-credit associate degree program will exceed the required general education core, and the remaining credits will either have to meet requirements in the major or transfer as general elective credit.

The Transfer Module in the state transfer policy was intended to provide, for students unsure about their educational goals, a mechanism that guarantees acceptance of a core of courses that apply toward meeting general education requirements at four-year colleges and universities. For a number of reasons, the module has not worked effectively to accomplish that goal. Courses listed in the module have not been updated systematically to reflect changes in general education programs, and certification of module completion has not been printed on student transcripts in a useful or timely way. Thus, four-year institutions must review transcripts on a course-by-course basis, defeating the purpose of structuring a core that transfers as a block toward meeting general education requirements.

Data on transfers from four-year institutions suggest that these students transfer earlier than two-year students, or lose more credits in transfer than transfers from two-year colleges. Overall, 70% of the transfers from four-year colleges and universities are classified as freshmen or sophomores at the receiving institution, compared to 50% of the transfers from two-year colleges.

These data indicate that 85% of the students that transfer from two-year to four-year institutions, and 71% of four-year transfer students, transfer in excess of thirty

STUDENT LEVEL OF FOUR-YEAR TRANSFERS TO PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

	Freshmen		Sophomore		Junior		Senior/5th year	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1993-94	345	20.8	529	31.9	383	23.1	379	22.9
2002-03	387	28.2	698	50.8	225	16.4	64	4.6

credits (sophomore level or above). Even if a common core of courses (35-45 credits) could be structured that would be universally transferable to all public institutions, the core could only partially fulfill most institutions' general education requirements. Additional courses still would be needed to complete general education and prerequisite major field requirements—courses more effectively articulated on a program-by-program basis.

Entrée to Four-year Degree Programs. Anecdotal information suggests that high student demand in a number of popular fields has forced some four-year colleges and universities to raise program admission standards, set quotas on program admissions, or limit course enrollments. These actions often result in decreased opportunities for transfer students, regardless of whether they are transferring from a two-year college or another four-year college, or are simply attempting to change majors within their own institution. Transfer students may be eligible for admission to an institution, but not to their desired major. These factors present real obstacles to effective planning for the part-time student who may take four to seven years to complete the associate degree.

The table on the following page indicates the most enrolled majors for 1993-94 and 2002-03 for transfer students from two- and four-year institutions. Twenty-four percent of the 1993-94 transfers, and 28 percent of the 2002-03 transfers were classified as "undeclared" or majors "unknown." It is unknown whether these students truly had not selected a major or whether they were denied admission to their intended major and offered general admission to the institution. (Majors were identified by the broad, national Classification of Instructional Programs—CIP—codes used to report institutional data.)

Business and computer/information sciences programs continue to be heavily subscribed programs, and for both two- and four-year transfer enrollments, programs in business administration/management and speech/rhetoric showed enrollment gains of 50% or more between 1993-94 and 2002-03. Four-year transfer enrollments also showed sizeable gains in the liberal arts and nursing programs, where two-year transfer students showed gains in finance programs. Programs that maintained strong enrollments (50+) by four-year transfer students included biology and psychology. For two-year college transfers, the programs maintaining strong enrollments included biology, English, history, liberal arts, interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary studies, nursing, and political science. The high number of enrollments in liberal arts and interdisciplinary studies suggests that some students may be in a "holding" pattern waiting for an opportunity to transfer into a highly selective or popular program where openings are limited.

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MOST COMMON MAJORS FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS

Major at Four-year Institution	Transfers from Four-year Institutions			Transfers from Two-year Colleges		
	1993-94 N	2002-03 N	% Change	1993-94 N	2002-03 N	% Change
Accounting	31	16	-48.4	107	101	-5.6
Art		22		39		
Biology	73	72	-1.4	179	169	-5.6
Business Admin/Mgt	29	48	+65.5	121	203	+67.8
Business (General)	122	15	-87.7	107	72	-32.7
Business (Other)		7		66		
Business Marketing		24		53		
Chemistry	17	12	-29.4	29	20	-31.0
Communications	19	13	-31.6	28	23	-17.9
Computer/Info Sciences	27	19	-29.6	84	86	+2.4
Criminal Justice	9	7	-22.2	55	32	-41.8
Electric/Electronics	13	5	-61.5	72	32	-55.5
Engineering Tech	3	0		59	28	-52.5
English Lang/Literature	82	43	-47.6	137	128	-6.6
Finance	9	11	-22.2	30	63	+110.0
History	69	27	-60.9	131	122	-6.9
Info Science/Systems		5		37		
International Affairs	9	8	-11.1	31	10	-67.7
Law Enforcement	3	2	-33.3	36	47	+30.6
Liberal Arts/Studies	9	24	+167.0	125	99	-20.8
Mass Communication	15	3	-80.0	34	4	-88.2
Mathematics	33	7	-78.8	44	22	-50.0
Mechanical Engineer	7	5	-28.6	41	20	-51.2
Mental Health Services		4		70		
Multi/Interdisciplinary St	30	22	-40.0	105	130	+23.8
Not Declared	289	306	+5.9	518	632	+22.0
Null (Unknown)	142	191	+34.5	415	442	+12.2
Nursing	34	57	+67.6	222	198	-10.8
Pharmacy	49	0		11	0	
Phy Ed/Teach/Coach	17	11	-35.3	50	30	-40.0
Political Science	33	30	-9.1	60	39	-35.0
Psychology	107	56	-47.7	253	206	-18.6
Public Admin	6	3	-50.0	32	27	-15.6
Social Sciences	75	3	-96.0	11	9	-18.2
Social Work	22	4	-81.8	86	43	-50.0
Sociology		12		39		
Speech/Rhetoric	11	21	+90.9	41	72	+75.6
Visual/Perform Arts		15		49		

Transfer enrollments have declined by more than 50% in some programs, which may indicate either decreased student interest or increased program popularity and competition with "native" students for admission. Among two- and four-year transfer students, electrical/electronics, mass communications, mathematics, and social work programs have experienced declining enrollments. Four-year transfers have also enrolled less frequently in public administration, social sciences, and history programs, and two-year transfers are showing declining enrollments in engineering technology programs.

Of the programs on the list of most-enrolled majors for transfer students, eleven are in program areas for which community colleges offer associate in applied science degree programs. This finding suggests that articulation agreements in these areas are providing, or potentially could provide, excellent transfer opportunities for graduates of those occupational programs.

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The Academic Performance of Transfer Students

Performance of Two-year College Students Following Transfer. Adopting policies to increase the transfer rate from two-year colleges should not be considered apart from promoting best practices that lead to improved transfer student performance in terms of time-to-degree, credit hours-to-degree, and grade point averages. The faculty have a key role in efforts to promote and support successful transfer—both at the two-year college in preparing students for admission to baccalaureate programs, and at the four-year institution in evaluating credits and validating prior learning.

A March 2003 VCCS transfer report examined the academic performance of 2,695 transfer students who entered a community college for the first time in fall 1993 and transferred to a four-year institution within four years. The grade point average for all coursework attempted during the first year at the VCCS college was 2.84, compared to a 2.73 GPA for all coursework attempted during the first year after transfer to a four-year institution. Although students appeared to experience a "transfer shock," or a slight drop in GPA, the grade point average at the four-year college was comparable to the GPA earned at the two-year college. Not surprisingly, the greatest drops in GPA were at the public institutions with the more selective admissions policies—the College of William and Mary, Mary Washington College, the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and James Madison University. The VCCS grade point average of students transferring to these institutions was over a 3.00, but students experienced drops in GPAs ranging from –1.02 at the College of William and Mary to a drop of -0.26 at James Madison University. The following table compares the academic performance of VCCS transfer students following the first year of coursework at both the two-year college and the four-year transfer institution.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF VCCS TRANSFERS AT PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS (COMPARISON OF VCCS GPA AND GPA AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION AFTER ONE YEAR)

Four-year Institution	Number of Transfers	Average GPA at VCCS College	Average GPA at Four-year College	Change in Average GPA
Ch. Newport	80	2.59	2.75	+ .16
C. of W&M	28	3.63	2.61	-1.02
Geo. Mason	425	2.77	2.74	-0.03
Ja. Madison	151	3.09	2.83	-0.26
Longwood	97	2.96	2.82	-0.14
M.Washington	59	3.35	2.65	-0.70
Norfolk St.	45	2.53	2.97	+0.44
Old Dominion	310	2.78	2.65	-0.13
Radford	279	2.67	2.68	+0.01
U. of Va.	91	3.46	2.87	-0.59
UVA-Wise	63	2.65	2.74	+0.09
Va. C'wealth	331	2.66	2.66	–
Va. Military	13	2.44	2.29	-0.15
Va. State	12	1.97	2.58	+0.61
Va. Tech	324	3.09	2.64	-0.45
TOTAL	**2700**	**2.84**	**2.73**	**-0.11**

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The VCCS provided information in the 2002 *Reports of Institutional Effectiveness* to show that 74.9% of the 1998-99 VCCS transfers to public four-year institutions were in good academic standing (2.00 GPA or higher) after the first year of coursework at the transfer institution. Data were not available to compare these results with the academic standing of other transfers or with native students after their first year of enrollment, but the data provided by the VCCS suggest that three out of four VCCS transfer students experienced academic success at the transfer institution.

Graduation Rates of Transfer Students. Although community college students exhibit more high-risk characteristics for completing the baccalaureate degree, the Ford Foundation has found that "the more credits a student acquires at a community college, the more likely s/he is to acquire a four-year degree."[25] A December 2002 report from the National Center for Education Statistics showed that students who began a degree program at a public institution and transferred to another institution were less likely to have left college within three academic years.[26]

As previously noted, only 13 percent of transfers from Virginia's two-year colleges are classified as freshmen when they enroll at public four-year institutions, and nearly half (47.4%) are classified as juniors or higher. But only 28 percent of the two-year college transfers earned the associate degree before transferring, compared to 37 percent in a study of 13 states cited in a 2001 Education Commission of the States report.

TRANSFERS FROM TWO-YEAR COLLEGES WHO COMPLETED THE BACCALAUREATE DEGREE WITHIN FOUR YEARS FOLLOWING TRANSFER

Cohort	Associate Degree Status	Baccalaureate Degree Status				Total
		Did Not Graduate		Graduated		
		N	%	N	%	
1993-94	Degree	340	30.7	769	69.3	1109
	No degree	1225	42.3	1671	57.7	2896
	TOTAL	1565	39.1	2440	60.9	4005
1994-95	Degree	331	29.1	808	70.9	1139
	No degree	1300	43.2	1710	56.8	3010
	TOTAL	1631	39.3	2518	60.7	4149
1995-96	Degree	366	33.8	718	66.2	1084
	No degree	1279	43.3	1672	56.7	2951
	TOTAL	1645	40.8	2390	59.2	4035
1996-97	Degree	350	31.9	748	68.1	1098
	No degree	1356	44.8	1669	55.2	3025
	TOTAL	1706	41.4	2417	58.6	4123
1997-98	Degree	376	31.7	811	68.3	1187
	No degree	1326	44.0	1687	56.0	3013
	TOTAL	1702	40.5	2498	59.5	4200
1998-99	Degree	349	30.3	804	69.7	1153
	No degree	1236	41.9	1715	58.1	2951
	TOTAL	1585	38.6	2519	61.4	4104
TOTAL		**9834**	**39.9**	**14782**	**60.1**	**24616**

[25] Hungar, J.Y. and Liberman, J. (2001). The road to equality. The Ford Foundation, p 101.

[26] Berkner, L., He, S., Cataldi, E.F., and Knepper, P. (December 2002). Descriptive summary of 1995-96 beginning postsecondary students: Six years later. National Center for Education Statistics 2003-151.

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Between 1993-94 and 2002-03, eighty-five percent of two-year college transfer students entered the four-year college with thirty credits or more (sophomore or higher standing), and 78 percent attended full-time. Of those students who had not earned the associate degree before transferring, 56.7% earned the baccalaureate degree within four years following transfer. Of the associate degree graduates who transferred, 68.8% earned the baccalaureate degree within four years. The overall graduation rate for that ten-year period was 60 percent. These data are consistent with the 2001 Ford Foundation study which found that the more credits completed at the two-year college, the greater the likelihood that students will complete the four-year degree.

To provide context for the issue of graduation rates, data on Florida's graduation rate for associate in arts degree transfers was examined for student cohorts who entered a four-year institution in 1992 and 1993. The system-wide four-year graduation rate (2 years + 4 years) for this group of students was 68.3% for those entering in 1993, and 67.7% for the 1992 group, comparable to Virginia's graduation rate of 68.8% for graduates of university-parallel associate degree programs.

Florida's state policy on transfer and articulation provides that, within certain limitations (financial resources, curricular requirements, space availability), any graduate of a community-college Associate in Arts degree program shall be granted admission as a junior to upper division courses at a public four-year university. Students who have not earned the AA degree and seek admission to lower-division courses at a four-year university must satisfy the same admissions requirements as beginning freshmen. Although provision is made for exceptions, this policy provides strong incentive for students to complete the two-year degree program before transferring.

Figures published on the Florida Board of Education website show that the percentage of students transferring without a university-parallel degree has dropped from 39% in fall 1994 to 29% in fall 2000, compared to 72% of Virginia's transfer population from two-year colleges. Virginia's transfer population also included students who completed applied degrees not intended to transfer, so the comparable four-year graduation rates may suggest that articulation between two- and four-year colleges in Virginia has had a positive effect on transfer and graduation rates for applied science degree graduates as well.

But how do graduation rates of transfer students compare with those of students who enter the four-year college or university as freshmen? Graduation rates of associate degree graduates who transferred were compared with graduation rates of students who entered as first-time freshmen and completed two years at a public or private four-year institution. Although the two-year college transfers may have taken more than two years to earn the associate degree, this approach attempted to compare transfer and native students as juniors. Students who did not complete two years of college or the associate degree were excluded, so results reflect a graduation rate based on a smaller group of students than that used in the system-wide ROIE measure of six-year graduation rates, which are based on all first-time enrolled students.

The four-year graduation rate for native juniors ranged from a high of 57.0% in 1998-99 to a low of 53.6% in 1996-97. The four-year graduation rate for those who transferred with an associate degree ranged from a high of 31.6% in 1998-99 to a low of 25.2% in 2000-01. The gap between the two rates has increased by six percentage points over the past seven years. One in four of the 2000-01 cohort of transfer students completed the baccalaureate degree within four years, compared with better than one in two juniors.

COMPARISON OF FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES FOR NATIVE JUNIORS AND ASSOCIATE DEGREE TRANSFERS AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Cohort Year	Student Population	N	Did not graduate within 4 years	Graduated within 4 years	Graduation Rate	% Difference
1994-95	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	19496 1382	8515 949	10981 433	56.3 31.3	25.0
1995-96	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	19606 1332	8655 915	10951 417	55.9 31.3	24.6
1996-97	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	20041 1331	9301 944	10740 387	53.6 29.1	24.5
1997-98	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	20779 1492	8978 1087	11801 405	56.8 27.1	29.7
1998-99	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	21789 1438	9379 984	12410 454	57.0 31.6	25.4
1999-00	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	22252 1320	9757 959	12495 361	56.1 27.3	28.8
2000-01	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	22956 1328	10087 994	12869 334	56.1 25.2	30.9
	GRAND TOTAL	**156542**	**71504**	**85038**	**54.3**	

COMPARISON OF FIVE-YEAR GRADUATION RATES FOR NATIVE JUNIORS AND ASSOCIATE DEGREE TRANSFERS AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Cohort Year	Student Population	N	Did not graduate within 5 years	Graduated within 5 years	Graduation Rate	% Difference
1994-95	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	19496 1382	4338 532	15158 850	77.7 61.5	16.2
1995-96	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	19606 1332	4525 543	15081 789	76.9 59.2	17.7
1996-97	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	20041 1331	4866 556	15175 775	75.7 58.2	17.5
1997-98	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	20779 1492	4567 616	16212 876	78.0 58.7	19.3
1998-99	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	21789 1438	4626 563	17163 875	78.8 60.9	17.9
1999-00	4-year college junior 2-year college grad	22252 1320	5024 564	17228 756	77.4 57.3	20.1
	GRAND TOTAL	**132258**	**31320**	**100938**	**76.3**	

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COMPARISON OF SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATES FOR NATIVE JUNIORS AND ASSOCIATE DEGREE TRANSFERS AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Cohort Year	Student Population	N	Did not graduate within 6 years	Graduated within 6 years	Graduation Rate	% Difference
1994-95	4-year college junior	19496	3311	16185	83.0	13.0
	2-year college grad	1382	415	967	70.0	
1995-96	4-year college junior	19606	3504	16102	82.1	15.6
	2-year college grad	1332	446	886	66.5	
1996-97	4-year college junior	20041	4498	15543	77.6	16.7
	2-year college grad	1331	521	810	60.9	
1997-98	4-year college junior	20779	3486	17293	83.2	16.1
	2-year college grad	1492	491	1001	67.1	
1998-99	4-year college junior	21789	3516	18273	83.9	15.5
	2-year college grad	1438	454	984	68.4	
	GRAND TOTAL	**108686**	**20642**	**88044**	**81.0**	

Extending the time frame increases the likelihood that both native juniors and two-year graduates will complete the baccalaureate degree, but the gap between the graduation rates for natives and transfers has increased for four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates since 1993-94. The graduation rates for both natives and transfers at private institutions declined over the past six years, but graduation rates of native students at public institutions improved slightly.

Most striking in these data are the differences in graduation rates between public and private four-year institutions. The table on the following page compares the differences in graduation rates for public and private institutions. Overall, the four-year graduation rates at private institutions are higher than the rates at public institutions, for both juniors and two-year college transfers. For native students, four-year graduation rates at private institutions are 10 to 15 percentage points higher than at public institutions, but the gap narrows to 1 to 3 percentage points for six-year graduation rates. Likewise, the gap between four-year graduation rates for transfer students at public and private institutions ranged from 13 to 19 percentage points, and narrowed to an 8 to 11 point gap for six-year graduation rates. Reasons for the discrepancies in graduation rates for two-year college transfers at public and private institutions should be explored. More selective admissions policies, fewer credits lost in transfer, higher level of support services, and cost of attendance may contribute to higher graduation rates at private institutions. High risk factors such as lighter academic loads, difficulties with academic performance, and personal or financial pressures could also explain the gaps between degree completion rates for native students and transfers.

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COMPARISON FOR FOUR-, FIVE-, AND SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATES FOR NATIVE JUNIORS AND TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES ENROLLED IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

Cohort Year	Four-year Graduation Rates				Five-year Graduation Rates				Six-year Graduation Rates			
	Public Juniors	Public Transfers	Private Juniors	Private Transfers	Public Juniors	Public Transfers	Private Juniors	Private Transfers	Public Juniors	Public Transfers	Private Juniors	Private Transfers
1994-95	52.8	29.6	67.8	42.7	76.6	59.6	81.5	74.2	82.5	68.5	84.8	79.8
1995-96	52.6	28.9	64.9	45.1	76.0	56.9	79.5	72.8	81.8	64.9	83.1	75.9
1996-97	49.9	27.0	64.1	42.5	74.7	56.4	78.7	70.1	76.8	59.4	79.7	70.7
1997-98	53.1	24.5	68.5	41.4	77.0	56.7	81.4	69.8	83.0	65.6	84.0	75.4
1998-99	53.8	28.6	67.7	47.5	78.1	59.1	81.1	70.4	84.1	67.2	82.9	74.9
1999-00	53.7	24.6	63.8	42.4	78.2	56.0	75.1	64.0				
2000-01	53.6	23.1	63.6	37.1								

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Efficiency in the Transfer of Credits

Precursor 1: Credits Earned via Early-college Programs. States offer dual *credit* programs[27] and dual *enrollment* programs[28] to provide opportunities for secondary students to take college-level courses. When students with credits earned via such programs attend four-year institutions, generally they are not classified as transfer students (unless they earned a very significant number of credits via these programs). Nonetheless, problems experienced by such students in receiving credit for these courses at the four-year level represent issues of possible inefficiency in the acceptance and/or "transferability" of such credits.[29]

In Virginia, enrollments in dual credit programs have grown significantly over the past several years.[30] The increasing popularity of these programs has raised concerns over: (1) program costs (a two-year college and a high school are each funded for such a program); course quality/rigor; (3) enrollment declines in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs in the high schools; and (4) dually-earned credit transferability to four-year institutions.

Some four-year institutions have expressed concerns regarding the large numbers of new high school graduates transferring dual credit courses, as well as the significant number of credits they wish to have applied to a degree program. The number of applicants from some school districts leads some four-year institutions to question whether students are screened carefully before being placed in college-level courses, and suggests that students who are not prepared for college-level work are earning credits for coursework that may not meet collegiate standards for academic rigor. Others have expressed concerns that courses delivered in the high school and taught by secondary teachers do not provide an equivalent collegiate experience, which requires levels of time management, critical thinking skills, and self-discipline not found in most high school classes. As a result, some students may experience difficulty in transferring their dually-earned two-year college credits to four-year institutions when they matriculate into a baccalaureate degree program.[31]

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[27] Dual *credit* programs provide opportunities for secondary students to enroll in college courses and to receive both college credit *and* credit toward meeting high school graduation requirements.

[28] Dual *enrollment* programs provide opportunities for secondary students to enroll in college courses where the college credit earned is *not* applied to high school graduation requirements.

[29] In most states, dual credit and dual enrollment programs were created to promote achievement by students and to increase efficiency for the state and for families. The 1988 *Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment* "recognizes that high school students who accrue college credit are more likely to continue with their education beyond high school than those who do not. The plan also offers a direct cost benefit to the Commonwealth of Virginia, especially as it avoids the unnecessary duplication of facilities and equipment, and to the individual families of the high school students."

[30] During the academic year 1996-97, enrollments in dual credit courses comprised 2.6% of the VCCS overall full-time equivalent numbers, with an enrollment of 1,879 FTES. Within five years (AY 2001-02) dual credit student FTES had more than doubled to 3,971, or 4.4% of the System's annual FTES. Dual credit student FTES in 2001-02 comprised over 10 percent of the total FTES at one-fourth of the community colleges, and at one college the figure was 25 percent.

[31] Some four-year colleges and universities are advising students who wish to earn college credits in high school to enroll in Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate, rather than dual-credit programs, and complete the end-of-course exams. Students who earn a passing score on these tests are

Precursor 2: Credits Earned while Completing the Associate Degree. Under most circumstances, students who begin their work toward a baccalaureate degree at a two-year college are well advised to complete the associate degree before transferring. Students who have earned an associate degree in a university-parallel transfer program are considered to have met the lower division general education requirements at public senior institutions and are awarded junior standing. Credits earned beyond the 40-55 credits required in most general education programs are applied toward requirements in the major or transfer as free electives. Students may be required to complete more than two additional years to earn a degree, depending on the way transfer credits are applied to advance the student toward degree completion, and some senior institutions also set limits on the number of credits that can be accepted in transfer.

How many credits do VCCS graduates complete in earning the associate degree? The previously-cited March, 2003, VCCS transfer report provides information on the *median* number of hours completed by graduates of associate degree programs. Half the graduates earned credits above, and half earned credits below, the median number to complete the degree.

VCCS Credit Hour-to-Degree Efficiency for Associate Degrees

Award Year	Associate in Arts Credits Required: 60-63		Associate in Science Credits Required: 60-63		Associate in Applied Science Credits Required: 65-69	
	Number of Students	Median Credits	Number of Students	Median Credits	Number of Students	Median Credits
2000-01	1731	67	2104	70	4439	76
1999-00	1640	67	1910	70	4435	76
1998-99	1693	68	1827	71	4385	77
1997-98	1667	68	1910	72	4385	77
1996-97	1677	69	1879	74	4730	77

The data in the table above were self-reported by the VCCS colleges and were not generated from the VCCS course enrollment files. Since these data were used to determine whether students had met requirements for a particular award, the median of earned credits excludes developmental courses, credits that were not applicable to the award, and credits that were attempted but not successfully completed, thus understating the actual number of credits students may have attempted.

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guaranteed college credit because institutions have had long-standing policies and success with these programs. As a further incentive, students are able to earn verified units of credit toward the Standards of Learning (SOL) requirements for high school graduation through AP and IB tests. The Virginia Department of Education does not permit students to substitute completion of a dual credit course to earn a verified unit of credit, primarily because the assessment instrument is not nationally standardized. Thus, students who attend high schools in remote or rural areas with limited access to AP or IB programs are excluded from opportunities to earn both college credit and verified high school units if they enroll in VCCS dual credit courses.

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Community college students frequently have to take developmental or remedial courses to prepare for college-level coursework—credits which cannot be used to satisfy degree requirements. Excess credits may also be a consequence of students changing their educational goals or failing to consult an academic advisor, and some have to repeat required courses to earn a passing grade. None of these attempted credits are reflected in these data as earned credits. A more accurate picture would require further research based on actual course enrollments to determine the total number of credits students attempt and earn at the community college by the time they complete an associate degree.

Although SCHEV guidelines set the required number of credits for an associate degree at 60 credits, the State Board for Community Colleges established a 60-63 credit range as the minimum/maximum requirement for transfer degrees (AA and AS). This includes two credits in health and wellness and one credit in orientation, which generally do not transfer. Based on the median number of credits earned, over half the graduates of an associate degree program earned 4 to11 or more credits in excess of those required for the degree.

In addition to students taking developmental courses, changing majors, or repeating courses, a number of other factors contribute to students having to complete more than 63 credits to earn the associate degree. For example, the AA degree requires foreign language at the intermediate level, so students who did not take foreign language in high school may be required to complete prerequisites at the beginning level. AS degree programs in engineering generally require more than 63 credit hours to ensure that transfer students are not disadvantaged by not having the courses necessary for success in upper-level courses at the four-year college or university. And although the AAS degree generally is not intended to transfer, articulation agreements may specify additional general education requirements for AAS students to make transfer possible into related professional programs at the baccalaureate level.

Precursor 3: Time-to-degree for Associate Degree Students. Another important measure of degree efficiency is time-to-degree, or the amount of time required from the date of first enrollment to complete the associate degree. In describing the transfer population earlier in this report, data showed that the majority of transfers from community colleges (78%) enrolled as full-time students at the four-year institution, but the data on community college enrollments indicate that the majority of students enrolled in the VCCS are part-time students (72%). With a reduced course load, students would be expected to take longer than two years to graduate. The table on the following page summarizes five years of data on time-to-degree for graduates of both transfer and applied associate degree programs.

The average time-to-degree of nearly five years reflects the fact that a number of students take 7-8 years (or longer) to earn the associate degree, but half the community college graduates earned the transfer associate degree in three years or less. For all public four-year institutions, the median time-to-degree (five year average) for graduates of baccalaureate degree programs is 4.5 years, less than the average time required by

VCCS TIME-TO-DEGREE FOR ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

Award Year	Transfer Degrees			Applied Science Degrees		
	N	Mean (in years)	Median (in years)	N	Mean (in years)	Median (in years)
2000-01	4124	4.71	3	4704	6.14	4
1999-00	3821	3.72	2	4710	5.02	3
1998-99	3875	4.82	3	4723	6.11	4
1997-98	3955	4.84	3	4703	6.01	4
1996-97	3945	4.82	3	5039	5.84	4

VCCS students to complete the associate degree. Clearly, community college students are taking longer to earn the degree. One reason is that the majority of students attend part-time, but further research is needed to determine how many of these students were required to complete developmental courses, or enrolled in courses not applicable to the degree they eventually pursued, or took elective (unnecessary) courses when required courses were unavailable (in order to carry a courseload sufficient to maintain their eligibility for federal financial aid), thus delaying time to graduation.

The applied degree programs require 2-9 credits more than the transfer degrees, and the gap between the two programs in time-to-degree has widened over the past five years. Students who enroll in applied programs may be less prepared for college-level coursework, or may be more likely to carry a reduced academic load while holding a full- or part-time job. Students who intend to transfer from an applied degree program also may have to take additional general education courses to meet requirements of an articulation agreement, so they may prolong graduation. Examining data on time-to-degree and data on credit-to-degree, indications are that not only are community college students carrying reduced academic loads, but also students who attend the community college as full-time students may be taking the minimum of 12 credits required for classification as a full-time student (also the minimum required for full-time financial aid).

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As evidenced by the findings of this report, transfer is an increasingly complex activity, process and phenomenon—one that intersects or crosscuts many other issues in contemporary higher education. The import of the data, analyses and results detailed in the previous pages is summarized below in terms of conclusions related to three major constituencies: transfer students, four-year institutions and two-year institutions. Corresponding recommendations based on these conclusions are also provided. The report closes with broad conclusions and recommendations for the state and institutional policymakers who will shape and direct transfer in the Commonwealth in the early years of the 21st Century.

Transfer Students

Transfer students should be encouraged to complete the associate degree prior to transfer in order to increase the likelihood that they will complete the baccalaureate degree. Not only do students benefit from earning additional hours at the community college and minimizing the financial burden of educational expenses, but also the Commonwealth benefits by the lower dollar cost per FTES to support students in two-year colleges. Furthermore, degree-seeking students at two-year colleges are more likely to access accurate sources of information concerning transferability of courses. Therefore, options should be explored to:

1. provide guaranteed admission to a public four-year institution to associate degree graduates who meet specific requirements outlined in regional articulation agreements;
2. require non-graduates to demonstrate ability through additional assessments of general education skills and knowledge (e.g. competency assessments, SATs) for admission to a baccalaureate degree program;
3. provide incentives through financial aid programs targeted for associate degree graduates;
4. develop a central technical infrastructure that can serve as a statewide, online interactive advising tool for determining how courses will transfer and apply toward degree requirements for various majors at participating institutions.

General characteristics of the transfer population (e.g. age, academic load, finances) tend to put such students at risk for not completing the four-year degree. Moreover, two-year colleges in Virginia may not be making significant contributions to increasing the percentage of minority students who transfer to four-year institutions. Therefore, additional research should be focused on minority student enrollment patterns to identify obstacles and develop strategies to improve minority student transfer and graduation rates.

Four-year Institutions

All capable students who enter a transfer degree program at a two-year college should expect to have reasonable access to a baccalaureate degree program when they complete the associate degree. Therefore, options that are consistent with institutional missions and projected enrollment growth should be explored for providing incentives for four-year institutions to increase the size of the in-state transfer population relative to other enrollments; such options may include:

1. offering higher dollars per FTES based on the percentage increase in proportion of transfers enrolled;
2. increasing financial aid for transfer students to attend those four-year institutions that exhibit the greatest capacity to absorb additional transfer students;
3. encouraging four-year institutions to give priority to graduates of two-year colleges in admissions;
4. encouraging dual-admission programs for qualified undergraduates to guarantee access for those transfer students best prepared to move into a baccalaureate degree program.

Institutional autonomy in admissions and the diversity of Virginia colleges and universities should be respected. Nonetheless, each senior institution should assume responsibility for enrolling qualified transfers from two-year colleges. Therefore, following a study of institutional missions and enrollment capacity in the system, consideration should be given to:

1. designating institutions as primary transfer institutions and providing incentives to develop support services appropriate for students at high risk for not completing the baccalaureate degree;
2. supporting better utilization of Virginia's private colleges to meet increasing demand for transfer enrollments.

Current enrollment patterns indicate that private institutions may have greater capacity than public institutions to absorb and support more transfer students. Therefore, SCHEV should:

1. explore the reasons for the discrepancies in graduation rates for two-year college transfers to public and private four-year institutions. Issues related to admissions policies, transfer of credits, support services, and cost of attendance should be addressed;
2. consider providing incentives for students to attend private four-year institutions (e.g. increasing the TAG grants) in the context of the cost to the state of supporting students at the four-year institutions versus the private institutions.

Articulation agreements, based on specific courses required for the student's intended major, provide the best guarantee that transfer students will meet requisites and

prerequisites and avoid duplicating courses or transferring an excess of elective credit. Therefore, the strong relationships already in place between local institutions should be encouraged further by:

1. supporting faculty meetings to develop regional articulation agreements by cluster area (e.g. business, education, engineering, social sciences) to assure smooth transfer among all participating institutions in the region;
2. encouraging institutions to provide distance education courses that allow students in other parts of the state to access courses that may not be offered locally so that they may participate in agreements outside of their own region.

Two-year Institutions

The majority of associate degree graduates who subsequently enroll at four-year public institutions receive classifications as juniors, but over time, these transfers tend to lag behind native students in four-, five- and six-year graduation rates. Too many credits earned at two-year colleges are being accepted in transfer as excess elective credits that do not meet specific requirements or advance students efficiently toward degree completion. Therefore, in order to increase the efficiency of credits transferred from two-year institutions, consideration should be given to:

1. defining appropriate lower-level requisites and prerequisites by field or discipline, which can also be used to satisfy lower-division general education requirements;
2. encouraging the declaration of a field(s) of interest and a transfer institution(s) by the time that students at two-year institutions have completed 30 credits;
3. strengthening language in the state transfer policy concerning waivers of lower-level general education requirements for graduates of a transfer associate degree program;
4. revisiting the recommendations made in 1999 by the Council to institutions and their Boards of Visitors concerning general education programs;
5. examining the phenomenon of "major creep" into the general education program, which promotes the designation of specific general education courses that can be "double-counted" to fulfill general education requirements and "other degree requirements" for the major.

Community colleges (and high schools) are funded for dual credit programs to encourage and support student aspirations to attend college and accelerate graduation with a degree. Based on the rapid enrollment growth in dual credit courses and on the increasingly reluctant acceptance of such credits at the four-year level, a comprehensive study of the costs, purposes, policies and practices in dual credit programs in the Commonwealth should be conducted. The study should examine the effectiveness of dual credit programs in accelerating time-to-degree, increasing access to college degree programs, and providing more rigorous academics for high-achieving students, as well as

perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders toward acceptance of college-level credits earned in high school. Additional information is also needed to compare the academic performance of dual credit students and students who complete Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs. Such a study is recommended before any policies are developed to encourage further expansion of such programs.

Students at two-year colleges tend to earn excess credits and to take more than two years to complete the transfer associate degree. Excess credits do not advance the student toward completion of the baccalaureate degree, and time-to-degree raises issues related to catalog year, curriculum changes, the "age" of credits presented in transfer, and access to high demand fields. Therefore, SCHEV should:

1. work with institutions to develop articulation agreements that define appropriate lower-level requisites and prerequisites by field or discipline, which can also be used to satisfy lower-division general education requirements;
2. study actual course enrollments for associate degree graduates and determine the full extent of, and the reasons for, excess credits earned for the associate degree;
3. encourage the VCCS to examine ways to improve academic advising and curriculum planning and encourage students at the two-year institution to declare a field(s) of interest and a transfer institution(s) by the time they've completed 30 credits;
4. work with institutions to improve the accuracy and accessibility of transfer information;
5. work with institutions to replicate the Course-based Model of Student Success to identify strengths and weaknesses in VCCS courses that prepare students for transfer.

Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

> *"The changes in attendance patterns ... are part of the larger currents of a wealthy open market .... As a society, we have become more consumerist and less attached to organizations and institutions with which we 'do business.' By consistently selling itself in terms of how much more money students will earn in their lifetimes as a consequence of attendance, higher education has come to reflect other types of markets .... Convenience, of which location is a reflection, has become the governing filter of choice, and convenience applies not only to place, but also to time, subject, and price. It is thus not surprising to find students filling their undergraduate portfolios with courses and credentials from a variety of sources, much as we fill our shopping bags at the local mall."*[32]

[32] U.S. Department of Education. (June 1988). Answers in the tool box. p. 39.

Transfer activity is becoming not only increasingly common, but also increasingly complex. The sheer numbers and varieties of the transfer "phenomena," compounded by nationwide deficiencies in tracking data at the student and credit levels, are contributing to an increasingly unclear understanding—if not definition—of transfer in general and successful transfer in particular. In Virginia, these factors are playing out against a backdrop of goals and/or expectations that are multiple and potentially conflicting at the student and institutional levels, and are unclear and/or poorly communicated at the state level.

As a result of the convergence of the broadening scope of transfer—its manifestations, its definitions, and its goals, perceptions of problems with transfer are increasing in Virginia. And no doubt, real problems related to transfer—beyond the data and findings of this report—are increasing. The end results are more vocal and frequent calls for the Commonwealth to "fix transfer," as well as an increasing variety of proposed solutions.

As stated in the Preface of this report, higher education is changing. As indicated by the quote above, college students are also changing. As their expectations about, and goals for, higher education change, Virginia must refine and communicate its goals and expectations for the transfer process. This report is intended to serve as a starting point for understanding the transfer phenomenon's growing complexity and broadening definition, as well as the widening expectations placed upon it by students, institutions and policymakers. This information should be used to revisit state and institutional policies on transfer; moreover, this report should function as a basis from which the Commonwealth should establish and prioritize clearer system-level goals and expectations for the evolving transfer phenomenon. With a common definition of transfer and clear goals for its effective implementation, the Commonwealth will be in a better position to identify strategies to enhance transfer and to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of those strategies in advancing higher education for all qualified students in Virginia.

APPENDIX:

UNDERSTANDING HOW CREDITS TRANSFER[33]

Perhaps the most misunderstood part of the transfer process is how credits transfer from two-year colleges. A number of factors are involved in determining whether or not the credits presented in transfer meet the standards and requirements of the student's intended major at the receiving institution. Sometimes a credit is not a credit.

Not all credits earned at the community college are accepted in transfer at the four-year institutions. Community colleges offer degree programs for a number of purposes—to prepare students for immediate entry into the workforce, to develop skills for career advancement or personal growth, and to prepare students for continuing their studies at four-year colleges and universities. Generally, courses taken in the liberal arts as part of a "university-parallel" transfer program will be accepted at the senior institutions. Courses taken in certain occupational-technical areas may not meet the requirements for transfer to a four-year degree program.

It is important that students understand the goals and purposes of the degree program in which they are enrolled at the community college. Degree programs designed for transfer include the *Associate in Arts, Associate in Science,* and *Associate in Arts & Sciences* degrees. The *Associate in Applied Science* degree program is not specifically designed to prepare students for transfer, although some courses in these programs may be transferable based on special arrangements, called "articulation agreements," between the community college and the senior institution.

Most two-year transfer programs require students to complete a minimum number of credits in English composition, the humanities or fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, and in some cases, foreign languages. These courses meet the lower level general education requirements of the four-year colleges and universities. In addition, some of the courses taken in the liberal arts may meet prerequisite or specific core requirements for courses in the student's major field of study. University-parallel courses that do not meet either general education or major course requirements will generally be accepted as elective credits toward a baccalaureate degree.

Courses designed specifically for certain occupational-technical areas usually do not transfer to meet general education or major field requirements at the receiving institution. Exceptions may be made for some major field courses in the case of programs articulated with professional schools at the four-year college. Elective credit may be given for some technical courses appropriate to the student's chosen field of study, but many courses may not transfer at all. Credits earned in developmental (remedial) courses or courses taught at a pre-college level generally will not be accepted in transfer.

Finally, non-traditional credits awarded at the community college may not be acceptable for transfer to some senior institutions. For example, credits earned through Credit-by-Exam, the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), the Advanced Placement (AP) program, or the high

[33] Reprinted from the Transfer Connection, a newsletter published by SCHEV and the State Committee on Transfer in 1996.

school dual enrollment program may not be accepted in transfer to all four-year colleges and universities because of differences in standards for awarding non-traditional credit. Many institutions will accept them from associate degree graduates if they were used to satisfy requirements for the transfer associate degree.

The college to which the student wants to transfer determines which courses will be accepted in transfer, how many credits will be awarded, and the type of credit that will be awarded (general education, major field requirements, or elective credit). The receiving institution must be able to ensure that the credit awarded represents college-level work taught by a qualified faculty member at a level appropriate and relevant to the student's field of study. Because each college determines its own policies about accepting credits in transfer, only the receiving college can guarantee transferability.

An important source of information on course equivalencies and the transferability of credits is the four-year college transfer guide, a publication available on senior institutions' web sites. In general, the most authoritative source of information is the admissions office at the four-year college, where admissions counselors can answer most questions or refer students to someone in the appropriate academic department who can. Most community college counselors and academic advisors can offer sound advice based on their experience, particularly with the local four-year institutions that a majority of their transfer students attend. These unofficial assessments of what will transfer are not confirmed until the receiving institution receives a final transcript from the community college and an official evaluation of transfer credit is sent.

Under most circumstances, students who begin their work toward a baccalaureate degree at the two-year colleges are well advised to complete the two-year associate degree before transferring. Students who have earned an associate degree in a university-parallel transfer program are considered to have met the lower division general education requirements at public senior institutions and are awarded junior standing. Certain majors, however, may require students to complete more than two additional years of prerequisites or other requirements specific to a professional field of study. In the case of non-transfer occupational-technical degree programs covered by terms of an articulation agreement, acceptance of credits is normally contingent upon completion of the applied science degree.

Although students can maximize the number of credits that will transfer by completing a college transfer associate degree, some students may choose to transfer before completing a degree program. Particularly for some highly selective or unique baccalaureate programs, students should follow the advice of an advisor from the four-year institution to ensure that courses selected will prepare them for their intended major. For the student who wishes to transfer but has not yet selected an institution or a major, the transfer module in the *State Policy on Transfer* was intended to present a set of courses totaling 35 credits that meet many of the general education requirements of the senior institutions. (For courses listed as a two-course sequence at the two-year college, some four-year colleges will accept only one half of the sequence, or require completion of the whole sequence but award no credit for half the sequence.) Provided the student meets the terms for completion of the transfer module, this set of courses should be accepted toward a baccalaureate degree program.

Most colleges have a maximum limit to the number of credits accepted in transfer. Graduation requirements for the baccalaureate degree include a minimum number of credits at the upper division level and a minimum number of credits completed at the four-year institution. The receiving institution determines the exact number of credits that can be transferred to meet those requirements.

Students who have not maintained continuous enrollment in the two-year college may find that some of their credits are "too old," especially in the technical, science or pre-health science areas. Some institutions will not accept any credits more than six or seven years old; some may apply the "age" criteria only to courses in the major. Still others will accept credits no matter when they were taken.

The *State Policy on Transfer* does not guarantee admission, but some colleges and universities will guarantee admission to all two-year graduates of an associate degree transfer program. Few colleges, however, will accept students on academic probation or suspension at their current college. Most colleges have policies requiring a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.00 or higher for all work attempted at the two-year college. This means that "D" grades are generally not accepted for credit. Since "P" grades (pass-fail) are not used to compute the grade point average, prerequisites or courses required in the major may not transfer for credit if taken under the P/F option.

Many colleges make a distinction between admission to the four-year college or university and admission to a particular program of study. Highly selective or high-demand programs of study may need a grade of "B" or higher in all courses attempted in order to qualify for admission. Meeting the minimum grade point requirement for admission to the college or university may not guarantee admission to a particular program.

Click Here to View State Policy on College Transfer

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